

'ARE YOU BRAVE ENOUGH TO JUMP?'

**AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF RURAL WOMEN'S RESISTANCE,
MILDURA 1997**

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ABSTRACT

This ethnography is the result of fieldwork carried out in Australia between September 1996 and October 1997, in the rural city of Mildura in north-west Victoria. The thesis focuses on women's personal narratives describing married life on the small viticulture properties surrounding Mildura.

The ethnography combines accounts of fieldwork events with analysis of women's personal narratives. Women's strategies of accommodation or resistance to gender inequality in marriage, work in the household and on the land, and domestic violence, and the fate of women who seek to resist or challenge the patriarchy of the rural city are explored. The contrasting 'truths' and influence of male oratory and women's testimony about married life in Mildura are also considered.

The first decade of the 'rural women's movement' in Australia provides the context for the ethnography. Since the mid 1980s an unprecedented era of social justice policy and programmes in Australia, influenced by 'femocrats' (feminist bureaucrats) in state and commonwealth (federal) governments, has supported the development of the rural women's movement, notably through public funding to establish rural women's networks.

The ethnography provides an alternative perspective to the dominant representations of rural women's lives in Australia in the 1990s in the popular and academic press; and supports work which has suggested that domestic violence against women and children remains the greatest barrier to gender equality, and the fulfilment of women's potential, in rural communities in Australia.

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Grateful thanks are also due to my fieldwork friends Paul Mathewson, Cath Murphy and Linda Roberts; fellow wwoofers, particularly Tobias, Breida, Mahame, Yohay and Aric; and the anthropology postgraduate students especially Martin Mills, Phillipa Hall, Ros Ebdon, Gillian Munro, Jenny Johnson, Joan Stead, Guro Huby, Rachael Gooberman-Hill, Joanna Jacobson and Fiona Harris.

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Final thanks are also due to The Carnegie Trust for the Universities in Scotland; Northcote Children's Trust, and the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University-Riverina, Wagga Wagga, who supported the fieldwork for this thesis.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me, and is based on my own work, save where acknowledgement is made below.

Gill M. Clark
April, 2001

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ADDH	Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity
ADFA	Australian Dried Fruits Association
AWIA	Australian Women in Agriculture
BPW	Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women
CD	Compact Disc
CWA	Country Women's Association
DPIE	Department of Primary Industries and Energy
FAAW	Federation of Australian Agricultural Women
NFF	National Farmers Federation
NSW	New South Wales
OSW	Office for the Status of Women
TAFE	Tertiary and Further Education College
VFF	Victorian Farmers Federation
WARM	Women in Agriculture and Resource Management
WISC	Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children
WWOOF	Willing Workers on Organic Farms

Glossary

Blocks	Apportioned land originally allocated to 'pioneer settlers' forming 'blocks' of land (effectively small farms) for viticulture and horticulture in the irrigation districts of Mildura.
Blocky	Viticulturist or Horticulturist who worked on the 'blocks.'
WWOOF	Willing Workers On Organic Farms: an international organisation which produces a listing of organic farms that accept volunteer labourers who 'work for keep', i.e. for food and accommodation. A farm on the listing is known as a 'wwoof farm' and the farmers as 'wwoof hosts.'
Wwoofers	Volunteer workers taking part in the WWOOF scheme are called 'wwoofers.'
Wwoofing	Working as a volunteer is referred to as 'wwoofing.'

Appendices 5 and 7 have been removed, with the approval of the Senate,
To protect the respondents.

Dec.2007

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PREFACE

On April 7th 1999 the following article appeared in the *Country Living* section of *The Weekly Times*, a national farming newspaper in Australia:

She dips her lid to wacky and wild—Mildura's 'Mad Hatter' has some fun

Mad Hatter artist Krystyna Schweizer has a reputation in the Sunraysia area of Mildura for being outrageous and zany. She prefers to call herself a freelance costume artist, although she is the first to admit "millinery is a fun, safe way for me to express my madness."

As a missionary's daughter growing up in Africa, Krystyna's life was full of friendships with villagers who wore vibrant colored and rich textured clothes. This tribal influence led to a lifetime passion for costume making. It wasn't until she became burnt-out in her demanding careers as a nurse and social worker that Krystyna turned to millinery as a creative outlet. "For me this is very therapeutic," she said.

What began as a fun activity soon turned into a serious hobby. Today, stepping into Krystyna's Hotchpotch Eco Wear studio is like entering a middle-eastern bazaar. The visitor is assailed with a riot of colour. The hundreds of unusual costume hats on display include the fez, court jester, witch hats, Arabian, musketeer, medieval, the Romany Woman, flat caps, floppy tops, 1920s style, turbans and the intriguing motion hat. Fairy tales, fantasy and science fiction dominate the range, with the vegetable kingdom represented by a pumpkin, eggplant or strawberry hat. "Velvet bell caps are the most popular with children," says Krystyna, who also designs haute couture hats suitable to wear to the Melbourne Cup.

Krystyna researches ideas for her designs by delving into her extensive collection of fairy tale and history books. An old photograph of her grandmother inspired Krystyna to design a traditional Black Forest scarf cap, ideal for cold climes. All Krystyna's hats are made from recycled fabrics, hence the name Hotchpotch Eco Wear. Old bedspreads, curtains, dressing gowns and damaged garments otherwise destined for the ragbag all capture the attention of Krystyna's magical fingers. She likes to work with rich felts, furs, lace, wool and natural fibres such as cotton and linen. Finishing details such as beads, lace inserts, jewellery, sequins, tassels, feathers and old belts are painstakingly stitched by hand.

Krystyna takes great delight in observing people's reactions to her hats. "There's a great deal of psychology connected with hats," she said. "People's personalities change when they try on a hat. It's as if they take on the character itself. Hats bring out the child in everyone." Krystyna advises that anyone can wear a hat, but as we age, we need colors that enhance our looks and soften our features. Many of Krystyna's designs incorporate a wide brim to afford protection against skin cancer.

When not creating hats, Krystyna can be found helping her husband Andrew Jones, on their organic farm where they grow a variety of grapes, avocados and oranges. Krystyna's cottage industry tides them over when times are tough "on the block." Besides selling hats from her studio, Krystyna attends folk festivals

such as Port Fairy, Womadelaide and the National Folk Festival in Canberra. Customers include international musicians and performers.

Krystyna is helped in her enterprise by her two daughters Havale and Naomi who spend their annual leave at the festivals with their mother.

This ethnography is the result of fieldwork carried out in Australia between September 1996 and October 1997 in the rural city of Mildura in north-west Victoria, and Krystyna Schweizer, the subject of Wallace's newspaper article, appears in every chapter of the ethnography. For part of the time I spent in Mildura I worked as a volunteer labourer on Krystyna's husband's block, and as a seamstress in her millinery business. Whilst Wallace's article is one version of Krystyna's life, this thesis incorporates another, alternative, account.

Wallace presents a seductive exemplar of a rural woman unable to 'cope' with the pressures of working away from the home, more comfortable with a 'serious hobby' than a 'demanding career', 'helping out' on the farm, and using her income to 'tide over' the household at difficult times.

On my return from Australia it would have been possible to write a *romantic* (Abu-Lughod 1990) sun-drenched thesis with case studies of entrepreneurial women, such as Krystyna, developing rural cottage industries: accounts of complementary, enterprising, handmaidens on the family farm. It was my experience before fieldwork that providing similarly engaging vignettes of rural development in Scotland would leave an audience or readership, as Campbell comments 'animated and pleased' (Campbell 1995: 58). However Campbell goes on to comment:

I've never been comfortable telling these stories ... I'd want to say: 'Hang on a bit. You don't think that's what it was like, do you? There was so much more to it than that.' But it's too late. You had the experience but missed the meaning. The yarns can be interesting in themselves, but they're really only worthwhile if they're a way to get further in; make people see more connections; make them think and change (Campbell 1995: 58).

Three years after returning home from fieldwork, it seems to me that fieldwork was, as Campbell advises, an experience which emphasised 'an extraversion to the up-country march as worthwhile in itself without these ulterior glances in the direction of the return' (Campbell 1989: 173), since on my return, I found that my friends and colleagues had little appetite for yarns of violence and intimidation, preferring to hear about fieldwork escapades in Mildura and around Australia, which fitted their expectations of a rural research endeavour.

However, I felt that my fieldwork experience demanded a response which took people further in and encouraged them to consider *other* aspects of rural women's lives. In discussing the role of agitprop in ethnography, when reflecting on a dismal episode of abuse of power and privilege in Brazil, Campbell asks, 'what am I going to do with both sides of this dismal story? Tell it, that's what' (Campbell 1995: 231). To some extent in making a decision to provide the readership with a less comfortable read, reflecting as I do on women's narratives of illusions of love within marriage, unrecognised and emotionally unrewarding labour on the block, and domestic violence, I and the women I worked with have also decided to 'tell it'—an action which I hope will support the advocacy role of the rural women's movement in Australia, and Krystyna's own resistance which is so effectively masked by narratives such as Wallace's article.

The title of the thesis is the from the J.Bayly song *Jump* on the Crying in Public Places Compact Disc (CD) *Jump!* (1996). Crying in Public Places, a four piece womens a cappella group, played at the Mildura Arts Festival in the Australian Autumn of 1997, and Krystyna and I bought their CD and played it in her cabin while we made hats. The song lyrics in *Jump!* ask 'am I brave enough to jump'—into an uncertain future, or out of current circumstances—and at the time, we mused that the CD had proved to be an appropriate soundtrack for Krystyna's experiences during the Autumn and Winter of 1997.

Research for this thesis was conducted under conditions of informed consent (see Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth (1999), and Chase (1993) for a discussion of the acknowledged limitations of informed consent), and presentation of the ethnography was negotiated with those involved in the research, both during and after fieldwork. As a result I would argue, in contrast to Sheehan, that time and distance have not blurred 'the distinction between what it is safe to write and what it is not' (Sheehan 1993: 82). Therefore this is a self-censored (Alder and Alder 1993) thesis, no pseudonyms are used, and place names have not been changed.

Gill M. Clark

Edinburgh, April 2001

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Adelaide Airport, October 1997

I insisted on the photograph overleaf (Plate 1) being taken when I arrived on the shuttle plane from Adelaide at Whyalla airport in October 1997, with Jane Wilkinson from the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, Margaret Wada of the Federal Government's Rural Women's Unit, and Miss Australia (Fundraiser) Tracey Secombe.

We were all en route to the South Australia Rural Women's Gathering in Kimba (famous for being 'Half Way Across Australia'), and had met up in the departure lounge at Adelaide International Airport. Jane had flown over from Wagga Wagga via Sydney, Margaret from Canberra, and I had come from Melbourne where I was staying in the Youth Hostel packing up my luggage into boxes to freight home to Scotland the following weekend, whilst intermittently telephoning Krystyna long distance to hear the latest news about her custody battle with her husband Andrew over their son Jesse.

Miss Australia was reluctant to be photographed but I insisted, hoping that the repairs to the bodice of one of only two dresses I had in Australia (torn out by Krystyna's dog while the dress had hung on a line in Mildura) would not appear in the photograph, and at the same time wondering how Miss Australia could possibly fit everything she needed for an overnight stay into the vanity case she is holding in the photograph.

After half an hour of driving around Whyalla trying to find the road to Kimba, we set off in our air conditioned hire car across the desert. Jane, Margaret and I had spent the morning in Adelaide between flights, and so Jane and I told Margaret about our delicious lunch at the wild food *Red Ochre Grill* restaurant; and Margaret told us about a leopard skin chiffon outfit she had bought in one of Adelaide's Malls. Meanwhile, Miss Australia spoke irritably into her mobile telephone arranging appointments and sounding increasing exasperated as the telephone signal began to break up.

I then recounted the latest episode in Krystyna's courtroom battle to Jane, and told her that faced with the possibility of astronomical legal fees, Krystyna's mother-in-law had



Plate 1. Left to right, Margaret Wada, Senior Policy Advisor Rural Womens's Unit, Tracey Secombe, Miss Australia (Fundraiser) 1997, and Gill Clark at Whyalla Airport. October 1997.

finally forced Andrew to see sense and allow Krystyna to move to Queensland to try and obtain treatment for Jesse, a child with Asperger's Syndrome. There was then a lull in conversation and Margaret turned to Miss Australia, who was by now unable to use her phone, to ask what her year as Miss Australia had been like. We were all astonished as Miss Australia told us it had been a 'hellish' year. She then turned to me and apologised for not wishing to have her photograph taken, but explained that she was under extraordinarily strict instructions not to appear as 'Miss Australia' except when fully made up, and narrated to us an astonishing account of title year. We later asked her if she had prepared her speech for the address she was due to give in Kimba, and she said that she never had time to prepare any speech as she was sometimes required to speak at five or six functions a day.

Four hours later at the 'Welcome to Kimba' civic reception, she stood up and gave a sparkling presentation to the Gathering on how her experiences as Miss Australia (Fundraiser) related to those of rural women. Thirty-six hours later, our workshop on 'women in agricultural leadership' tape recorded and ready for transcription, Jane and I parted company in Adelaide, and five days later I left Australia.

Back in Edinburgh I ran out of research funding, and ten months later became a bureaucrat in the rural research branch of the Scottish civil service writing up my thesis at the weekends, during evenings, and at vacation time. Jane completed the research project, and started a PhD on the history of rural women in Australia, and we corresponded on the merits of different primary schools in Wagga Wagga for her daughter. Margaret sent me a beautiful Sydney Olympics postcard which adorned my office wall, and I was delighted to read that during 1998 in a storm of publicity, Miss Australia wrote a dramatic exposé about her Miss Australia experiences for the Australian press. Meanwhile, Krystyna went to Queensland, but then returned to Mildura to make another attempt at living on Andrew's block, she told me in her letters, for the sake of Jesse.

The trip to Kimba was one of many such encounters and experiences that formed the fieldwork for this thesis: women exchanging news, personal narratives, fragments of oral history and autobiography, testimony, other women's biography, and planning or reporting on resistance. The ambiguity between Miss Australia's poised presentation of self and her personal anger; the commitment to shopping, doing lunch, *and* feminism, amongst the others in the car; and the contrast between Wallace's later report of Krystyna's happy family life, and my news en route to Kimba of Krystyna's bitter custody

battles with her husband, are indicative of broader ambiguities and tensions which recur in the central themes of this ethnography.

Rienharz comments that 'Feminism is a perspective, not a research method' (Rienharz 1992: 240), and this ethnography is written from a feminist perspective,¹ recounting fragmentary resistance, and personal narratives illustrating women's awareness of gender inequality in Mildura. It is a rarefied, and I would suggest relatively serious account, of a broader and more zestful and colourful fieldwork experience. However, at times it is perhaps more appropriate to take issues and one's work more seriously, and as I found, to become unexpectedly involved in advocacy. I begin the ethnography below, with an overview of the thesis.

Thesis Overview

Chapter One sets out the regional, political and recent historical context for my ethnography carried out in Australia between September 1996 and October 1997 in the rural city of Mildura in north-west Victoria (see Maps 1, 2 and 3 overleaf). Fieldwork for this thesis was carried out shortly after the election of the Howard Liberal and National Party Alliance Administration in Australia, and during 1996-7, considerable concern was expressed in the media and by feminists, about the impact of the Howard Administration on progress made by the Australian women's movement, notably the success of 'femocrats' (feminist bureaucrats) in the civil service and, more recently, the rural women's movement.

The rural women's movement (which accepts that 'rural women' is a contested term, and does not claim to represent aboriginal women) was initiated in Victoria in 1987 with the establishment of the Rural Women's Network, and has developed at a state level in

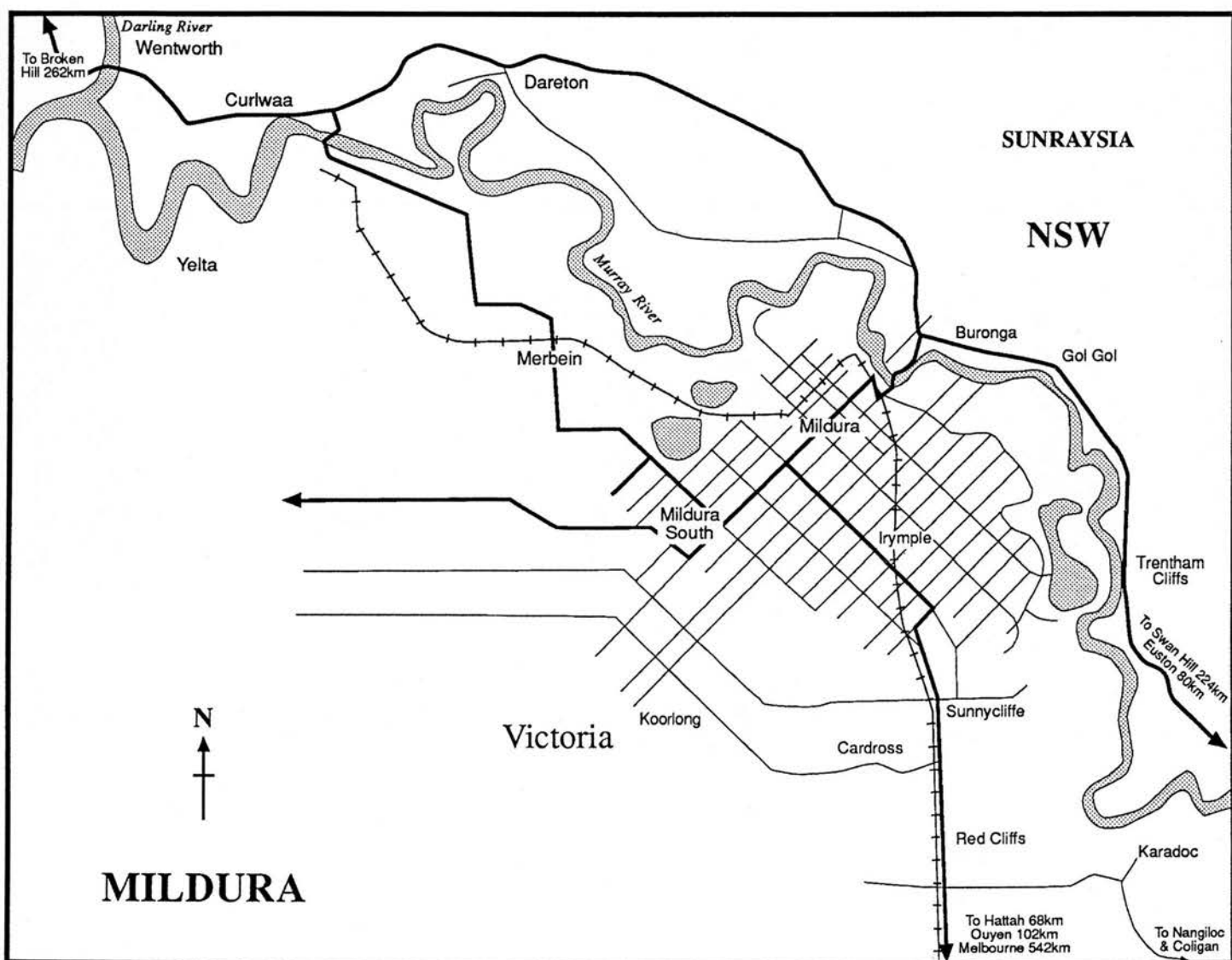
¹ Moore writes that 'both the label 'anthropologist' and 'feminism' remain under radical interrogation, and as a feminist anthropologist I find my relations with these terms to be strenuous, nuanced and unrelentingly complex' (Moore 1994:2). In discussing the problem of language and, in particular, theoretical language, she continues, 'difficulties in this area are compounded because anthropologists and feminists, and indeed different groups of feminists, habitually use a set of terms *that they imagine* have a common meaning' (ibid.: 6 emphasis added). I acknowledge these tensions, and the contested nature the 'feminist' epithet. However, in the same way that Moore seeks to critique anthropology from a feminist perspective, as discussed below, I argue that this thesis is a contribution to the feminist critique of rural studies. If it is necessary to locate the thesis within a feminism I would locate it within 'second wave rural feminism' (McGowan 1997), and align myself with the feminist politics of the Australian 'femocrats' (feminist bureaucrats) discussed below (and see also Eisenstein 1996).



Map 1. Australia



Map 2. Victoria



Map 3. Mildura and Environs

Victoria, and across the other Australian States, in parallel with federal developments such as the establishment of the Rural Women's Unit. Awareness of rural women's issues has also been raised by The Australian Broadcasting Company's (ABC) Rural Woman of The Year Award, and during fieldwork in 1997, the first Women in Agriculture and Resource Management (WARM) Forum, hosted by the federal government.

The rural women's movement in Australia has been documented extensively in policy reports, popular publications, and in the academic press. Therefore in the first chapter of the thesis I argue that this thesis makes a contribution to the discussion of gender inequality in interpersonal marital relationships on family farms (blocks); and a contribution to what Leipens describes as the 'wider than agriculture rurality' (1996: 1). From an anthropological perspective I also argue that despite political and policy progress, rural Australia remains culturally, and in *practice*, 'no place for women.'

Chapter Two of the thesis goes on to describe the fieldwork experience and introduces the 'frame story' for the ethnography. It describes some of the contrasting representations of life in Mildura, and the research relationships developed through 15 months of participant observation and interviewing. The 'sensitive' nature of my ethnography is also discussed.

The third chapter of the thesis sets out the analytical approach of the ethnography. The collection and observation of the use of personal narratives proved to be the most appropriate research strategy in the field, and in contrast to detailed oral life histories, personal narratives are used in the thesis as narratives told to me within a 'broader, learned context' (Okely 1994a: 45). The western (North American/European) feminist perspective on personal narratives is an important focus of the thesis, as is the consideration of multiple 'truths' provided by personal narratives. The chapter also contains an exploration of how personal narratives are used strategically in a social context and, in particular, the different attributes of the personal narratives told by men and by women in Mildura. Throughout the ethnography a distinction is drawn between the efficacy of men's strategic oratory, and women's muted testimony. In later chapters it becomes apparent that whereas women expressed knowledge of the 'rules' of the strategic deployment of personal narratives in Mildura, men demonstrated mastery of 'the game' (Bourdieu 1977), against which women's countermeasures proved to be ineffective. The illocutionary power of words, and the use of veiled speech is also discussed, and illustrated in later chapters. The foregrounding of Krystyna's personal narratives, and the relevance of using this perspective is then discussed, notably through reference to

Okely, who argues that 'marginal voices, like the court jester both challenge the centre and also show its form' (Okely 1996: 214). The reasons for giving prominence to the themes of marriage, work and domestic violence in the ethnographic analysis of these narratives are also explained.

The gendered rural context of Mildura is the subject of Chapter Four, together with local representations of 'rural women' and 'rural men' by women themselves. Features such as the quotidian focus of women's representations of rural women's capacity for hard physical labour on the land, their ability to cope with difficult circumstances, the expectation of women's commitment to 'holding the family together,' and the understanding that 'rural girls' are 'less trouble' than 'city girls,' suggest that to some extent the women I met were 'apprenticed' (Okely 1975) in childhood or after marriage to subordination and a life of limited opportunities. Women's representations of rural men present some ambiguities, in that 'rural men' were almost exclusively described by women in terms of how they were 'not like rural women.' In addition, women discussed at length the constraints and restrictions placed upon them by men, and yet described rural men in Mildura as personally and emotionally limited. The significance of women's understanding of 'men,' and 'rural men' in particular, as having a 'natural' *disposition* towards violent behaviour is revealed in later chapters. Exclusion of women from the public sphere, notably in relation to primary (viticulture and horticulture) production, provides an interesting contrast to the national discourse of gender complementarity discussed in Chapter Eight.

Three ethnographic chapters form Section II: Chapters Five, Six and Seven explore women's experiences and interpretation of men's manipulation of local representations of 'family values.' In these chapters diverging male and female perspectives on issues of marriage, work and domestic violence are provided. The power of male oratory and the comparative ineffectiveness of women's countermeasures in the form of testimony are illustrated, and the role personal narratives play in persuading the listener 'how to think about the matter' (Weiner 1991: 179) is explored. Men's absence of reaction to 'gender shock' (Eisenstein 1991) highlights the tensions between men's reported resistance to change within their households, and women's perceptions of social changes enhancing opportunities for women outwith Mildura. The power of 'the family' as a trope when used in relation to work, marriage, property, the family farm, child custody disputes and 'local families' incorporating immigrant or migrant wives, illuminates the ambiguity of references to 'the family' and 'family life' in Mildura—an ambiguity often resolved in the favour of men. Likewise, ambiguities and tensions between men and women are amplified

through the 'narrative of the gift,' where gift and commodity transactions are imbued with emotion and meaning.

The first of these chapters in Section II focuses on marriage and explores the paradox of women's expressions of optimism about courting and the prospects of finding a 'good match' for themselves within the broader context of an awareness of gender inequality in marriage (in general) in Mildura. The metaphor of falling in love is discussed as providing what Linde (1993) describes as 'adequate causality' (and a denial of personal agency) in the life story or personal narrative. The meanings of gift exchange, and the assembling of household utensils and furnishings prior to marriage to a Mildura 'blocky' (farmer) is discussed within the context of the blockies' reported disinterest in any change in their home and household arrangements after marriage and the general expectation in Mildura that blockies' wives will 'look after' their husbands. Broader issues of inequality were interpreted and discussed by women in terms of the gendered division of quotidian domestic tasks, narratives relating to which are used in this chapter to describe isolated moments of resistance.

The second ethnographic chapter of Section II addresses women's personal narratives of work because they were the most socially acceptable way in Mildura for women to articulate their dissatisfaction with the experience of gender relations within their marriages. Whilst capacity for 'hard work' was a source of pride, women were frustrated about the absence of private or public recognition of their labour within the household or out on the land. Women spoke to me about work as metaphorically 'building relationships,' and the consequent tensions arising when men described women's work as 'favours' owed to their husbands, as domestic labour and a wife's duties. Block work was described as particularly emblematic of rural women's predicament, and women suggested to me that they were 'apprenticed' to accept disabling work patterns. The chapter illustrates how resistance to these arrangements was transformed by male oratory describing women who offered resistance as 'not able to cope.' I also explore the relationship between men's largely unstated expectation that they should be 'looked after,' and the frequently expressed oratorical statements of their ability and duty to 'provide' for 'the family.' Craft work is briefly considered as a socially acceptable means (in Mildura) by which women were able to seek financial independence and self-expression. The chapter is an implicit critique of the national discourse of gender complementarity promoted by the Howard Administration.

The final chapter in Section II is about how women come to terms with domestic violence and intimidation through personal narratives. I argue that the public discourse on domestic violence in Mildura, provoked by the establishment of a federally funded domestic violence shelter, also provided a vocabulary for private discussion of domestic violence issues. The establishment of the shelter in Mildura challenged representations of family life in Mildura, but ambiguities remained in the dissonance between women's descriptions to me of the shelter providing a sanctuary for women 'on the run,' and the reality of the shelter providing a space to allow women to leave, and then return to, violent husbands or partners in Mildura.

The pervasiveness of fear is discussed in relation to the everyday experience of domestic violence—fear of violence, and fear of the possible causes of domestic violence, such as resorting to the law to seek redress. An episode drawn from Krystyna's personal narratives describing her attempts to obtain a diagnosis for her son as a child with Asperger's Syndrome is considered in detail. This episode describes the power of men's oratory over women's testimony, and illustrates the consequences of women's resistance alluded to in other writers' accounts of life in Australian rural communities.

Finally, Chapter Eight provides a short reflection on how this ethnography can contribute to a discussion of the interaction between on the one hand, the state and national policy discourse, and on the other, the everyday realities of rural women's lives. The chapter reinforces concern over the appropriation and direction of the national discourse on rural women, and illustrates some of the tensions between the femocrats acting within the civil service—attempting to embed rural women's interests within the Howard Administration—and rural women's activists. The Women in Agriculture and Resource Management (WARM) Forum is used as an illustration of what respondents described as a 'bureaucratic moment' which amplified activists' concerns that there was, at the time of fieldwork, little room on public platforms for women who did not conform to the preferred Howard Administration 'model' of gender complementarity or who were not economically successful.

Australia in 1996 and 1997

Australia is a postcolonial constitutional monarchy with a population of approximately 17 million people, the majority of whom live within twenty kilometres of the coastline, with only five million people living in non-metropolitan areas. Australia is a

Commonwealth of six federated states: Western Australia, New South Wales; Queensland; Victoria; South Australia; and Tasmania, in addition to the two Territories, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. My fieldwork was located in Victoria, the smallest and most densely populated of the Australian states with a population of approximately 4.5 million people, only 30% of whom live outwith the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Gullestad comments that 'for good and for bad, Norwegian anthropology is embedded in local social policy. This situates the research close to important current problems' (Gullestad 1992: 32). Similarly I would argue that this ethnography is inevitably embedded in national and local social policy. The national political context is of particular relevance to my ethnography, since during the decade prior to my fieldwork in 1996 and 1997, the then ruling federal Labour Administration introduced wide ranging social justice programmes, including numerous gender equity initiatives, and supported the rural women's networks discussed below. Leipens asserts that aided by the influence of such programmes, 'issues of women's equality have entered the rural and farming contexts through government policy and service provision as well as the popularised versions appearing in news and entertainment' (Leipens 1996: 101). Thus the rural women's movement arose from a broader state and federal discursive context in Australia which included the theme of 'women as equals.'

The Keating Labour Administration was replaced in 1995 by John Howard's 'Economic Rationalist' Liberal and National Party (conservative) Alliance Administration, which:

Like their counterparts in other countries advocating Thatcherite and Reagan-style policies ... attacked the consensus over a strong role for government in economic development ... [and] argued that public sector spending, rather than "priming the pump" of the economy as in the Keynesian model, served to drain funds from and block private expansion (Eisenstein 1996: 184).

Significantly, 'economic rationalism' ('an ideological position that gave primacy to market interests over human needs' (Eisenstein 1996: 196)) was critiqued by the women's movement in Australia as a 'particular threat' (Sawyer 1990: xvii) to women's interests, which 'was directly damaging to women, both by decreasing the number of jobs in the public sector and by cutting back on the social services available to women for children and families' (Eisenstein 1996: 196). In addition, at the time of fieldwork, Prime Minister John Howard was widely represented in the media as an advocate of the New Right, which favoured social policy designed to support the 'nuclear family' and 'traditional values.'

Eisenstein comments that under economic rationalist administrations 'social justice claims were redefined as "special interests", to be "mainstreamed"' (Eisenstein 1996: 185). During my fieldwork, rural women's activists, and some of my respondents, were particularly critical of the 'mainstreaming' approach taken to women's issues by the Howard Administration. Mackay and Bilton note that 'critics of the Commonwealth Government argue that this approach, in practice has led to reduced resources for women' (Mackay and Bilton 2000: 63), most notably the abolition of the 'women's budget' and the removal of the Office of Status of Women from the Cabinet Office (Crook 1997).

During fieldwork, other national events and developments which impinged on ethnographic discussion and experiences included the repercussions of the Port Arthur Massacre,² the political debate provoked by Pauline Hanson's Maiden Speech (House of Representatives Official Hansard 1996), and the Wik Decision relating to native title rights.³ All of these, and other major events, stimulated debate and discussion amongst my respondents in Mildura.

The Rural Women's Movement in Australia

The broader rural policy context and the development of the rural women's movement in Australia played a major part in the development of both my fieldwork and the resultant ethnography, and I concur with Campbell, who asks:

² In April 1996 Martin Bryant shot and killed 35 people in what came to be known as the Port Arthur Massacre. As a result, stricter gun laws were introduced across Australia, and at the time of fieldwork, gun owners were being compensated for guns they were forced to surrender under the new legislation. See also Chapter Five and Chapter Seven regarding male affection for, and women's fear of guns in the rural household; and Gun Control Australia: <http://www.guncontrol.org.au/> (February 2001).

³ The Mabo decision made on 3rd June 1992 granted native title to Murray Islanders and overturned the notion of *terra nullius* by recognising Aborigines' prior ownership of the land prior to white settlement in 1788. At that time, the High Court decided that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders could be the owners of the Crown Land on which their people had always lived, and this was referred to as Native Title. The Wik people then asked the Federal Court in June 1993 if any native title survived to their old lands on Cape York which had been leased to pastoralists. The Native Title Act became law in January 1994 on the (incorrect) assumption that pastoral leases did extinguish native title, but the High Court determined in December 1996 that pastoral leases did *not* necessarily extinguish native title—a ruling known as the Wik decision (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, Tuesday April 29, 1997. Page 1).

What is the point of presenting an account of the 'political and social organization' of the Trobrianders or of anyone else if such pivotal facets of their lives [for example, the colonial administration] are ignored (Campbell 1989:16).

My interest in fieldwork in Australia arose through reading and writing (Clark 1997) about what seemed to be, from the Scottish perspective, the remarkable progress and development of the Australian rural women's movement, and I regard this ethnography as a study of 'meaningful practice, produced in the interplay of subject and object, of the contingent and the contextual' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 32) with, in this case, the context being provided by the rural women's movement and associated policy and practice in rural Australia.

From the outset I acknowledge that 'rural women' is a contested term. Amongst others, Grace and Lennie (1998), Crook (1997) and Leipens (1996) have explored this issue, and they recognise the strategic importance of lobbying under the symbolic construction (Cohen 1985) of the category of 'rural women.' Leipens notes that it is appropriate to use the term 'rural women' to represent women as a group, because it places 'women as 'rural' and ... [promotes] the reality of many farm women's experience, that is, an experience that includes farm, family, rural communities and industries' (Leipens 1996: 176). Popular definitions of 'rural women' such as that provided by the New South Wales Rural Women's Network,⁴ resonated with rural women themselves, and such descriptions were embraced by my respondents who identified themselves as 'country girls' or 'rural women,' and viewed the categorisation as unproblematic and a well founded reflection of their geographical and cultural circumstances.

It would also be appropriate to acknowledge here that this thesis only discusses the 'white,' 'settler' (Marcus 1988) community in Mildura, and does not comment on aboriginal women's issues. Working with aboriginal women requires the type of research protocol adopted by Jackson (1995) and, in a postcolonial context, I would share concerns such as those expressed by Morris (1991) and earlier by Haynes (1979) about the appropriateness of an anthropologist in my position collecting and representing aboriginal personal

⁴ 'There is no definitive rural woman; she may have lived on the land for 40,000 years or a mere 4 months. She may or may not speak English, she may be 18 or 80, a wife or a single woman. She may be a farmer, or run a business or be raising a family. She may live and work in a regional centre or the remote outback, a mining town or a small coastal village. To the Rural Women's Network, the term 'rural' includes all people who live outside metropolitan areas, including farm women and women who live in villages, towns and rural cities' (New South Wales Agriculture 1999: 25).

narratives. In addition, I recognise the different priorities of aboriginal women and white feminists. As Eisenstein comments:

The gulf between Aboriginal women and white feminists ... [is] also connected to a difference in priorities and issues ... [in the past] Aboriginal women were fighting for the right to keep their children alive. Rather than worrying about the right to abortion or contraception, they were concerned about getting decent nutrition and living standards, so that they could raise healthy children, rather than see them die for lack of water (Eisenstein 1996: 112).

Eisenstein goes on to remark that, 'as with indigenous peoples around the world, the primary Aboriginal political demand is for effective land rights, to create a viable economic and political base and to restore the cultures devastated by white settlement' (Eisenstein 1996: 9). The extreme and unique disadvantages faced by aboriginal people in rural towns like Mildura are not something that can be adequately addressed in this thesis.⁵ However, concerns about the rural women's movement's lack of engagement with aboriginal women was raised at the rural women's gatherings I attended and was identified as a challenging issue for rural women in a report on Women and Aboriginal Reconciliation (Australian Institute for Women's Research and Policy 1997: 27).

The history of the rural women's movement is an extension of the history of the broader women's movement in Australia which came to prominence in the 1970s through women's activism and, significantly for this thesis, the strategic deployment of 'femocrats' in government. Sawyer comments that:

'Femocrat' is a term invented in Australia to describe feminists who take up women's policy positions in government. Many of these were recruited from outside into middle-level or more senior positions in the bureaucracy and were appointed because of expertise and advocacy skills developed in the women's movement (Sawyer 1990: 22-23).

She went on to observe that, by 1990, Australian women had 'created a range of women's policy machinery and government-subsidised women's services (delivered by women for women) which is unrivalled elsewhere' (1990: xv). Eisenstein also asserts that the most distinctive feature of the Australian feminist scene is the prevalence of femocrats:

A highly visible group of (mostly Anglo) women, openly committed to feminism, femocrats were senior public servants who owed their positions to

⁵ For academic comment on Australian aboriginal issues, see also, for example, Anderson and Trigger (1981), Hamilton (1984), Collmann (1988), Rowse (1988), Beckett (1988), Morton (1989), Anderson (1989), Larbalestier (1990), Lattas (1990 and 1991), Archer (1991), Bennett and Blundell (1995).

pressure from the organized women's movement. The femocratic strategy rested on a gender analysis holding that governments were run by and for men and that government policy reflected the interests of men (Eisenstein 1996: xii).

Significantly, Eisenstein goes on to comment that, as a result, during the early 1990s:

The rhetoric of government agencies reflected a widespread acceptance of feminist analysis. Prime Ministers personally launched special programs for women in language that acknowledged the patriarchal structures preventing women's economic, political, and cultural equality (Eisenstein 1996: xiii).

In the specific context of this thesis, an acceptance of a feminist analysis of political discourse is particularly significant in relation to the development of domestic violence and sexual assault policy and programmes in Australia. For example, Sawyer (1990) commented on the significance of the New South Wales Child Sexual Assault Program being firmly based on feminist analysis, a position which she contrasted with the UK at that time, where child abuse was viewed, from a policy perspective, as the result of family dysfunction rather than the abuse of male power (Sawyer 1990: 159-60).

In addition I would assert that it is critical to understand the broader public policy context for this ethnography. As Eisenstein observes:

Feminist analysis invariably contests the fictive boundary between public and private spheres, pointing out instead that public policy shapes and constrains private life, in the interest of encouraging some kinds of outcomes and discouraging others. The family sphere is well and truly shaped by public policy by means of a variety of measures, from education and tax policy to direct family supports of various kinds. In addition, issues that in the past were considered private to families have become and will increasingly become public issues, in part because the insistence of feminists has put them on the political agenda (Eisenstein 1991: 95).

Like Eisenstein, who was impressed by the highly political feminists she encountered, and astonished that 'in Sydney, apparently, one could say both 'feminism' and 'socialism' without apologies' (Eisenstein 1991: 8), I was struck by the way in which women I met identified themselves as feminists and I learned a great deal about strategic lobbying skills—in particular, at the WARM Forum I learned about the crucial importance of 're-grouping over coffee' to re-evaluate strategy for the day (see Chapter Eight).

In the 1980s and early 1990s, working through the federal Office for the Status of Women, femocrats orchestrated a series of key federal policy milestones for women in Australia,

perhaps the most significant of which for this thesis were, firstly, the National Agenda for Women launched in 1988 which sought to consult with women across Australia and to meet the particular needs of specific groups of women, including women in rural and remote areas and, secondly, the National Strategy on Violence Against Women in 1993.

At a state level, within the broader national context of policy development for women in the 1980s and 1990s, individual States in the Commonwealth then established Offices for the Status of Women, and the existence of these Offices created a policy environment for the subsequent development of State Government-supported rural women's networks. My decision to base my fieldwork in Victoria was determined by the fact that 'Victoria has been the place where farming, social and political conditions combined most visibly to support the early shape of the [women in agriculture] movement' (Leipens 1996: 118). The Rural Women's Network in Victoria was the first network to be established in Australia (in 1987), as a result of the appointment of the first women's advisers in the Department of Agriculture by the Victorian Cain Labour Government in 1986 (Crook 1997, Alston 1996), an event which is often used in Australia to mark the inception of the rural women's movement.⁶

Over the decade prior to my fieldwork, the Victorian Rural Women's Network⁷ and the associated 'rural woman's gatherings' (referred to later in the thesis) then mobilised rural women's activism in Victoria, and across Australia. McGowan comments that the gatherings were, and continue to be,

Locally organised, state wide, women centred events characterised by "connectedness" where: women tell their stories; networking activities take place; and which feature self improvement and consciousness raising workshops; building of self esteem and confidence; personal and professional educational activities; and raising the profile and confidence of rural and farming women. Each gathering is "passed" on from community to community, with an important element being the local sponsorship for event both "in kind" and through financial support (McGowan 1997: 16-17).

⁶ For a history of the rural women's network in Victoria, and other associated developments, see Appendix 1 *Rural Women in Australia: a potted history*, reproduced from the 1997 10th anniversary edition of *Network* the Victorian Rural Women's Network magazine.

⁷ The Rural Women's Network in Victoria has two major objectives, which are set out in every edition of *Network* magazine as follows. Firstly, to link women's groups and interested individuals into a network towards sharing resources and skills to meet the needs of rural women, and secondly, to enable women in rural Victoria through their own contact and support network, to have a more active and influential role in government decisions which affect their lives and those of their families and communities. The free circulation of *Network* magazine in Victoria is considered to play an important part in fulfilling these objectives.

I attended four state gatherings during 1997 in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland.

Returning to a federal level, the International Women in Agriculture Conference in August 1994 in Melbourne was widely seen as a turning point in the federal Government's attitudes to the rural women's movement. The conference was the largest ever agricultural conference held in Australia with 850 women from 34 countries attending (Alston 1996, and see also Leipens 1996). In the following year, 1995, the first National Rural Women's Forum was convened and 77 rural and remote women (representing over 40 organisations from across Australia) came together to establish a National Agenda for Rural Women which resulted in 27 policy recommendations (Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University-Riverina 1995a and 1995b). Significantly, in relation to this thesis, Alston comments:

It is notable that these recommendations did not prioritise commodity concerns or market strategies, items which tend to dominate the agendas of the traditional farmer organisations. In assembling the recommendations for the Forum, delegates were indirectly exposing the failure of these traditional farmer organisations to centralise social issues or to give prominence to the concerns of women (Alston 1996: 80).

The Rural Women's Policy Unit in The Department of Primary Industries and Energy was then established in July 1995, with the objectives of improving the status of rural women by gaining greater recognition of women's role in primary industries; increasing the participation of women in the policy making process; and developing closer consultation with women to ensure that issues relevant to women were being addressed. Collaboration with existing rural women's organisations and state government agriculture and primary industry bodies, was also viewed as a priority for the Rural Women's Unit, as was promoting opportunities for women—notably by increasing the number of rural women on relevant Departmental Boards (see also Chapter Four and Chapter Eight). Political progress for the rural women's movement was also demonstrated by a National Rural Women's Stakeholders Meeting in January 1996 (Department of Primary Industries and Energy (DPIE) Rural Women's Unit 1996a and 1996b) and a meeting with the Prime Minister John Howard on the first World Rural Women's Day, 15th October 1996 (DPIE Rural Women's Unit 1996c).

The timing of my fieldwork coincided with the next development (at a federal level) for the rural women's movement: the convening of the first Women in Agriculture and

Resource Management (WARM) Forum in March 1997 (DPIE 1997). This event, which drew rural women's delegates from all over Australia and which I attended as an observer, is discussed briefly in Chapter Eight. The primary focus on economic issues at the Forum was later interpreted by some rural women's activists as a defensive response by the Rural Women's Unit to 'speak in a language they [the economic rationalists] understand.' Some of the rural women's activists suggested to me that the Howard Administration was in danger of veering away from the principle of the 'three legged stool' which had emanated from the first National Rural Women's Forum ('Rural Viability is like a three-legged chair: environmental, economic and social issues must receive equal attention and support') to a policy driven solely by economic concerns. However other activists suggested that the manoeuvring of the femocrats within the Rural Women's Unit could also be viewed as a strategy (which ultimately proved successful) to embed rural women's issues in the Howard Administration, and engage relevant Ministerial interest.⁸

During the 1990s, parallel events in the Australian media further raised the profile of individual rural women, and broader rural women's issues. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio Rural Woman of The Year Award was initially introduced as an ABC Radio Queensland Country Hour initiative, but was promoted as a nation-wide competition in 1994. The aim of the award was to 'recognise the role and contribution of women in primary industry around the country,' and the competition resulted in six State Finalists, an individual State 'Rural Woman of the Year,' and then a final round to decide on the 'Australian Rural Woman of the Year.' Selection criteria for the awards were involvement and achievement in primary industry, commitment to sustainable primary industry, leadership and team working skills, and communication and vision.

The State and National winners became well known celebrities throughout their states and the country, and the award provided a platform for them to promote their industry and the interests of rural women. During my fieldwork Jan Denham (an organic citrus producer from Sunraysia) was the Victorian Rural Woman of the Year, and Barbara Scott a wool grower and garment manufacturer from New South Wales was the national winner. Significantly, however, despite the unrelenting presentation of the award winners as economically successful 'rural Superwomen' (Crook 1997), the winners I met were under no

⁸ Since my fieldwork, the Rural Women's Unit has been retained and a second unit, *The Rural and Regional Women's Unit*, has been established, reinforcing what many respondents told me was a recognition, (particularly by John Anderson, the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy at the time of fieldwork), of the importance of the rural women's vote to Liberal and National Party politicians.

illusion about the need for the pursuit of equality issues in rural communities, and one award winner I met commented 'we'll all drop dead trying to make a change.' Notably, in Mildura, it was rumoured that on hearing about his daughter-in-law's success on winning the Victorian Award in 1996, Jan Denham's father-in-law allegedly merely grumbled to his golfing friends that she had not changed her name after marriage, and continued with his round of golf.

The development of Rural Women's Community and Commodity Groups also provides a valuable source of published information on rural women's affairs in Australia. These groups were largely set up in response to women's exclusion from primary industry networks and organisations, and also epitomised the ethos of the rural women's movement which was that individual women had the capacity to change policy through community led groups. Key groups were *Australian Women in Agriculture* (AWIA) formed in 1993 to represent and raise the profile of women in agriculture, address inequalities, and secure the future of agriculture in Australia, and *The Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women* (FAAW) formed in 1994 to undertake research and lobbying, and provide scholarships to women in agriculture. In addition, other women's Commodity Groups were growing in numbers during my fieldwork. These included: the *Women and Dairy Project* initiated under the auspices of the Dairy Research and Development Corporation, the International Wool Secretariat's *Women in Wool* Consultative Group, *Women in Timber*, and *Women in Wine*, all of which aimed to promote the visibility and contribution of women in their industries.

Therefore at the time of my fieldwork, it was clear that, as Leipens observes, 'through a combination of political and discursive strategies the [women in agriculture/rural women's] movement has recorded a substantial effect upon farmer, media, industry and government spheres' (Leipens 1996: 13).

Despite the growth of the 'new' rural women's movement, the Country Women's Association (the Australian equivalent of the Scottish Women's Rural Institutes) was still the largest women's membership organisation in Australia. In addition, for completeness, it would be appropriate to include reference here to the Australian Women's Rural Coalition which at the time of fieldwork had successfully convened as an informal working alliance of women's groups concerned with, and working together, on rural issues. The Coalition comprised of the CWA, AWIA, The Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (BPW) and FAAW, and the Coalition hosted a live-to-air ABC Regional Radio Victoria Forum on *The Future of Farming Communities* featuring

Marilyn Wearing (see Chapter Six and Chapter Seven) in April 1997. Many of the women I met in Mildura set aside time to tune in to the broadcast, and the common sense discussion of rural women's issues in the programme led to numerous conversations in Mildura about the Radio Forum and the impact of 'women like us' talking on the radio about the need for a greater recognition of rural women's concerns.

The Rural Women's Movement in Australian Academic and Popular Literature

The extensive policy documentation reflecting the development of the rural women's movement—for example, at a federal level, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet et al. (1998); Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University-Riverina (1995a and 1995b); DPIE Rural Women's Unit (1996a, 1996b, 1996c); DPIE (1997); DPIE Rural Women's Unit (1997); Gooday (1995); National Farmers Federation and Senator Jeannie Ferris (1997); and Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (1999); at a state level in South Australia, Kerby et al. (1996); and in Victoria, Victorian Women's Council (1994 and 1995); and Bailey et al. (1996)—is complemented by the academic literature on broader rural women's issues. Dempsey's longitudinal research in 'Smalltown' (in rural Victoria), which repeatedly identified gender inequalities (Dempsey 1987, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, 1994) together with Poiner's work (for example, Poiner 1979, 1990 and 1994) provide the two most commonly referred to sociology 'community studies' in Australia with a gendered perspective. More influential, however, have been two collections of articles on rural women's concerns edited by James (1989) and Franklin, Short and Teather (1994). These collections—together with other Australian work, for example by Bryson and Wearing (1985) and Alston (see below)—have helped to broaden the academic debate on rural women from a preoccupation with women's 'role' in the readjustment of the agricultural sector and environmental issues (see below) to discussions incorporating race, sexuality, work, violence and other issues affecting women in rural Australia.

The particular significance of such rural women's research in Australia has been the overt and explicit reference to feminist analysis. For example, Alston (1990a) commented on feminist concerns in the study of farm women in Australia, something which academics elsewhere have been less inclined to do (with notable exceptions, for example Brunders (1985), Little (1986), Darque and Gasson (1991), Shortall (1994), Carbert (1994) and Brandth and Haugen (1997)). Alston has subsequently documented and critiqued farm women's and rural women's experiences from a feminist perspective (Alston 1991, 1994,

1995a, 1995b, 1996 and Alston and Wilkinson 1998); and her work has been followed by others. For example, Leipens' work on the women in agriculture movement (1996) and women's activism (1998a, 1998b); and Crook's work (1997) on leadership in the CWA have both been important feminist studies. Likewise, Teather's series of publications on rural women's issues have provided further analysis of Australian and international developments from a feminist perspective (Teather 1992, 1994, 1995 and 1996).

Publications aimed at a lay audience have also informed the popular understanding of rural women, for example, Scutt's edited collection of accounts of women's experiences of moving from the city to the country (Scutt 1995). Contributions to popular anthologies such as Maher (1994) as well as autobiographies by prominent rural 'personalities' (for example, Henderson 1992) have also been influential.

The Relevance of Rural Women's Research to The Rurality Debate

The published academic work on rural women's issues in Australia is particularly important because of the role it has played in generating a feminist academic discussion of gender as part of a 'wider than agriculture rurality' (Leipens 1996: 1). In recent years rural studies have been dominated by the 'rurality debate,' led in the UK by English sociologists, such as Halfacree and Murdoch, which has sought to distinguish 'rural' as a social representation *vis-à-vis* the rural as locality (for example, see the work of McLaughlin (1986), Cloke (1987), Cloke and Milbourne (1992), Murdoch and Pratt (1993), Halfacree (1993 and 1995), and Pratt (1996)), and has paid scant attention to gender and women's issues. This development in rural studies was symptomatic of a turn towards socio-cultural post-modernism, where the symbolic assumes precedence over the material and where the severing of the social representation of the rural from any material referent also makes the former a site of social struggle within discourse, as promoters of competing representations strive for hegemony (Halfacree 1993). In this way, the rural can be viewed as a site of contested discourses ranging from discourses of environmentalism to discourses of nationhood and identity. Halfacree's assertion that 'the rural' is materially despatialized, as the 'sense of' the rural is separated from its 'existential realness' (Halfacree 1993) has been particularly influential. Latterly, however, in 1997 Cloke has highlighted the role of cultural studies in emphasising new perspectives on 'real and hyperreal countrysides' and has called attention to the neglected geographies of rural others, including women (Cloke 1997: 369). It is perhaps appropriate to comment that this thesis does not seek to contribute to the rurality debate *per se*, except to support the work

of authors who have identified the absence of a gender and feminist perspective as an ongoing problem in rural studies.

Australian academics have also engaged in the rurality debate, although I would argue that the extreme geographical differences between metropolitan 'urban' Australia and the rural regions and outback, mean that within Australia there remains an undisputed 'taken-for-granted' understanding of 'rural' or 'country' Australia. In contrast to Europe, in Australia rural areas are more obvious as is evident in the pragmatic and applied approach adopted in research and publications (for example, Share et al. 1988). The rural research field is dominated by Rural Social Research Centres located in Queensland, New England and Charles Sturt Universities, and the key focus of Australian rural academic debate (including feminist debate) has been generated through *Rural Society*, the journal of research into rural social issues in Australia, *Key Papers* produced by the research centres, for example Alston (1991), Alston (1990b), Boylan and Alston (1993), and edited collections such as Share (1995), and Lawrence et al. (1996).

'Rural Women' in 'Rural Studies' in Europe and North America

The academic work on rural women's issues in Australia is also particularly significant because, with the exception of work focusing on farm women's issues within the broad field of rural studies, outwith Australia, rural research has been largely gender neutral or gender blind. The European and North American academic focus on women's work and changing economic roles on farms and their involvement in farm diversification does, however, again provide a useful academic context. The central research themes of these publications—such as the difficulties women experience when attempting to gain recognition as farmers in their own right, and men's resistance to recognising women's work—are themes which are refracted in the ethnography reported here. Rural women's issues have been debated in Europe through the pages of *Sociologia Ruralis* (notably in two special editions in 1988 and 1999⁹); in *The Journal of Rural Studies* (notably in a special edition in 1991), and in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland through an annotated bibliography (Finn and Forde 1993).

In the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland the work of Gasson (for example 1988), Whatmore (1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1993), Whatmore et al. (1994), Shortall (1992, 1994, 1996),

⁹ Significantly, however, 8 out of 10 of these articles were about different aspects of the Australian experience.

O'Hara (1987, 1994) and O'Hara and Kelleher (1987), has been particularly significant in relation to describing rural women's experiences on farms. Taking a broader view, Byrne et al. (1995) explored women's experiences beyond the farm gate, and Little (1991a, 1991b) and Little et al. (1991) carried out research into rural women's employment issues. Latterly Little and Austin (1996) have reflected on the place of women in the rural idyll by exploring some of the images of the English rural family.

Despite Braithwaite's research (1993), which established that in Europe only a minority of rural women are farm women, research across Europe on gender in rural areas has continued to focus on women in agriculture—see, for example, in Germany, Pfeiffer (1989) and Inhetveen (1990), in Holland, Hillebrand and Blom (1993), and De Vries (1993), in Norway, Almås and Haugen (1991), Thorsen (1991), and Brandth (1994), and see Overbeek et al. (1998) for a 'trans-national' European perspective on women and farm diversification. The *Gender and Rural Transformations in Europe; Past, Present and Future Prospects* conference in Wageningen in October 1999 sought to broaden the European women's research agenda, but was again dominated by papers focusing on women in agriculture. Research in the United States and Canada has also focused on farm women's experiences—for example in the United States of America, Sachs (1983, 1987, 1991, 1996); Fink (1991), Deseran (1989) and Deseran and Simpkins (1991), Haney and Millar (1991), Wright (1995), Wells (1998), and in Canada, for example, Shaver (1990 and 1991), Shaver and Reimer (1991), and Mackenzie (1994).

Some researchers in this field have sought to explore rural women's predicament in the developed world in the comparative context of the situation for women in the developing world but, in a sub-discipline which already adopts a trans-national comparative approach, I am unconvinced by the usefulness of such a broad strategy. One example of this approach is provided by Sachs, who, in the introduction to her recent book on rural women, agriculture and environment writes:

I draw herein on the experiences of rural women in the United States, Africa, Asia and Latin America to contrast and compare the differences, similarities, and complexities in rural women's lives (Sachs 1996: 5).

In this respect research on rural women's issues in Australia is particularly significant because of the progress that has been made by and for rural women at grass roots and at government policy level. Sachs, who avoids commenting on the Australian experience in her book, concludes that:

Although feminist rural scholars may convey and celebrate the multiple perspectives of rural women, the views of rural women seldom directly influence government assemblies, corporate policies or international politics (Sachs 1996: 178).

Except, of course, I would suggest, in Australia where rural women have influenced all three.

This thesis does discuss the experiences of women on the land, but my primary interest has been in the marital and domestic relationships of these women. In a review article, *Rethinking Gender and Work: Rural Women in the Western World*, Sommestad comments on the importance of exploring this dimension of women's lives. She writes:

Finally it is clear that personal experiences and interests always shaped women's positions on family farms. Most importantly, women's farm labour took place as part of a marriage contract and within a patriarchally organized farm enterprise. As a consequence, daily life and labour greatly depended on the marital relationship. *My main criticism of the books examined here is that few of them go more deeply into this important dimension of farm women's lives* (Sommestad 1995: 104 emphasis added).

The Anthropological Perspective

Within anthropology, even when adopting the trans-national approach of the leading rural studies journals (for example, *Sociologia Ruralis*, *Rural Sociology*, *The Journal of Rural Studies*) and edited collections, interest by anthropologists in gender or rural women's issues in a 'first world' context has been slight. Ethnography which influenced my decision to work in a first world rural setting include early anthropological 'community studies' for example Frankenberg (1957), Littlejohn (1963) and Brody (1973) and the more recent approaches to an 'anthropology of locality,' for example, Cohen (1982, 1986, 1987) and Dominy (1990). Some ethnographies written about social life in first world rural communities have focused on matters concerning marriage, the family and kinship, for example, Strathern (1981), Bouquet (1985) and Munro (1996), while others have concentrated on a historical perspective, for example, Segalen (1983 and 1986), and Zonabend (1984). Recent research has also drawn attention to the contemporary geographical mobility of people and the changing nature of 'community' as a structure of feeling and source of identity, for example, Rapport (1993), McEachern (1992), Gray (1984, 1988 and 1998) and Jedrej and Nuttall (1996).

Notwithstanding the more pragmatic approach of Australian scholars to rural studies discussed above, Australian anthropology also informs this thesis, notably through work which considers how issues of 'rural mythology' and images of the pastoral as identified by Williams (1973) resonate in the particular circumstances of Australian society. Of particular significance has been work focusing on what have been described as the 'overarching texts' or 'grand narratives' of Australian society: texts 'which operate across the whole nation, texts which tell something about the ... encompassing structures, hierarchies and politics of Australian society' (Marcus 1990: 15). These texts were made meaningful, and consciously or unconsciously strategically deployed (see Chapter Seven) by respondents in Mildura, and one aspect of the thesis is to consider how, in Mildura

Cultural practices arise out of assumptions about the national character; how the discourses on national identity construct specifically Australian concepts of masculinity and femininity and how these constructions continue to influence contemporary values, attitudes and beliefs (Schaffer, 1988: xii).

In her discussion of the ideological significance of the rural, Kapferer draws attention to the importance of 'the bush' in shaping concepts of 'Australian-ness' and comments:

The characteristic figures and images of rural mythology, generated in specific historical and material conditions, find continued resonance in the contemporary circumstances of social and political action across the nation, in metropolises, suburbs, regional centres, country towns and isolated habitations ... [the] image of Australia as the bush, and of Australians as embodying virtues mythologically conceived of as essentially 'rural,' remains fundamental to our understandings and mystifications of ourselves, in relation to each other and to outsiders, as it has ever been (Kapferer 1990: 88 - 91).

She goes on to observe that in Australia the rural-urban contrast has enormous ideological significance, underpinning diverse manifestations of 'Australian-ness,' and in commenting on the fictional town of Coopers Crossing (the setting for a popular television series), she writes:

The flying doctors of Coopers Crossing, and other inhabitants of the little town, portray those rural virtues of resourcefulness, independence, energy, sincerity, mateship and good judgement which are characterised not only as belonging to country people, but indeed to all Australians (Kapferer 1990: 98).

Kapferer concludes that the separation of rural and urban interests is a taken-for-granted assumption in Australia which provides a foundation for the mythologising of Australian-ness as the embodiment of rural virtue, through an ideology produced in, by and for, an urban industrial population, and finally asserts that rural Australia is an

ideological reality that country people in Australia seek to emulate and realise (Kapferer 1990). Within this ideology the 'bush' and the 'rural' are gendered as male space. The cultural ramifications of Kapferer's analysis is a main theme of this thesis.

Barham (1988) argues that the myths of Australian national identity, notably myths relating to the convict period, Ned Kelly, Bush Stories and the Anzac First World War tragedies, have contributed to the dominant 'common-sense Australian cultural understanding of women,' in particular, women conspicuous by their absence, or else represented in roles of gender complementarity (Barham 1988: 483). Schaffer concurs with this view, and notes that 'the myth of the typical [rural] Australian exudes a style of masculinity which excludes but also defines the Australian woman who stands in relation to him' (Schaffer 1988: 4).

This set of landscape values is of particular significance because, for men and women, it has the effect of amplifying and substantiating the authenticity and dominance of rural men while it has the opposite effect as regards women. As Marcus has observed:

The real and most authentic Australian—the bloke who battled with the elements, the natives and the heat, the 'mate' who took all that the gods could deliver and kept on going regardless—is to be found only in the Outback, in the real bush, out there in the Back-of-Beyond, in the Never-Never. There is sometimes found what might be called the 'myth' of the bush-wife, but that long-suffering creature has little place in the broader structures of the mythical Outback, *and very clearly has no real place here....* It is difficult, for example, to be a 'real' Australian, beating about the bush, overcoming hardships, and enduring the elements—without at the same time recreating the essential masculinity of the outback landscape. *For the bush itself is male space and women had no place in it* (Marcus 1988: 5 emphasis added).

Schaffer comments that 'What we take to be common sense knowledge about Australia and Australians is the effect of relations and strategies of power produced by various discourses' (Schaffer 1988: 18). The discourses identified by Schaffer (1988) and Marcus (1988 and 1989) in relation to Henry Lawson's bush stories¹⁰, and the Lindy Chamberlain case have particular relevance for this thesis.

¹⁰ Henry Lawson was a prominent Australian novelist and poet of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, whose short story, *The Drover's Wife*, introduces the character of the 'Bush Mum.' Schaffer comments: 'All Australians know her. As children they read about her in school. As adults they encounter it [The Drover's Wife] more often than any other story in anthologies of Australian prose' (Schaffer 1988: 128).

The attributes of the Henry Lawson character of the 'Bush Mum' are echoed by respondents' descriptions of themselves as 'rural women,' as women 'able to cope' (see Chapter Four), and in how men subverted women who offered resistance to the Mildura patriarchy as women 'unable to cope' (see Chapter Six and Seven). Coping pragmatically with life's difficulties was also a leitmotiv that ran through many of the personal narratives I gathered during fieldwork. Quoting the influential work by Ann Summers and Manning Clark, Schaffer comments:

In *Damned Whores and God's Police* Summers relates that although women are seldom presented in a positive light (when they appear at all) in the histories of Australia, one of the few depictions of women which might be seen as positive is Manning Clark's description of the bush woman. In Henry Lawson's stories she takes the form of the drover's wife. Here is how she is represented in Clark's history and recalled in Summer's text: 'out of such squalor and hardship, which drove the menfolk into erratic, unsteady ways in the primitive huts of the gentry, a matriarch quietly took over the central position in the family, and in the huts of the servants a "Mum" came into her own.' Summers challenges this view as an example of Clark's idealization of women in the bush as 'copers.' She claims that in both the literature and the history of Australia this depiction is unrealistic because it fails to recognize the real hardships which women faced in the bush, including the physical threats of rapacious men (Schaffer 1988: 70).

Thus Schaffer suggests that the 'Bush Mum' took the central position in the family, when men were driven to 'erratic unsteady ways' by the hardship of life in the bush, a view which appeared to prevail in Mildura in 1997 (see Chapter Four).

The sense of the bush being a dangerous and unsuitable place for women was also commonly held in Mildura. Barham comments that through bush stories and Australian 'legends,' 'the bush increasingly becomes identified with man and as a dangerous place for woman' (Barham 1988: 498). This association was exemplified in the debates arising out of the much publicised Lindy Chamberlain case, in which Lindy Chamberlain was accused of murdering her baby whereas she testified that the baby had been snatched by a dingo. Schaffer argues that the Lindy Chamberlain case was 'placed in a field of meaning and then explained in relation to that field' (Schaffer 1988: 65). She writes that:

The infant victim [Azaria Chamberlain] stood in the place of all the repressed and irrational fears about national identity—that the native son might succumb to the cruel mother; that the mother might ruthlessly harm her innocent children; that mother nature can victimize her sons; that identity, potency, authority of the self over the other is never secure. These powerful imaginative associations are embedded in consciousness of what it means to be Australian. It is likely that they were activated by the press in its construction of the Chamberlain case. *It is not the 'reality' or the 'facts' of the case which deserve closer scrutiny but the modes of representation which*

enabled the population to read the events according to pre-existing systems of meaning (Schaffer 1988: 65 emphasis added).

Marcus also describes 'the punishment' of Lindy Chamberlain whereby family values were re-asserted, and public angst assuaged. Marcus writes:

Mrs Chamberlain was a woman at the heart of Australia's centre, at the centre of the wild 'outback.' Women have no place in the Australian wild. They have, of course, always been there, but they are marginalized and contained and their presence is ignored or minimalized. The outback, the bush, is a male domain, a male space of mateship from which women are ideally absent.... In an era in which women challenge male rights to control them and in which women can no longer be confined to a narrow domestic domain, Mrs Chamberlain was forced to bear the brunt of reaction.... The bad mother was punished severely, family values were re-asserted, and public angst was assuaged (Marcus 1989: 18 - 19).

The impact of these cultural constructions influencing contemporary social life and the way in which they influenced the *reading of events* in Mildura are analysed in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven.

Conclusion

Despite political and policy progress for women in Australia, I have argued that from an anthropological perspective, rural Australia remains culturally, and in *practice* 'no place for women,' and I have highlighted the ways in which this thesis makes an important contribution to the 'wider than agriculture rurality' (Leipens 1996: 1). The next chapter describes the methodology used in the field, and the frame story for the subsequent ethnography.

CHAPTER TWO

MILDURA: THE LOCALITY, AND THE FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

In critiquing the social science adoption of the analogy of 'triangulation' when using a variety of research methods in the course of a research project or fieldwork, Porter comments that:

The navigation analogy is more accurate, referring to the process whereby a position is 'fixed' using, preferably, different kinds of measures, for example compass bearings, depth soundings and radio bearings or at least 'position lines' drawn from different positions. The underlying idea is that the wider the variety of evidence you can bring to bear, the smaller the area of doubt about your position (Porter 1994: 70).

In this case, I would argue that the research methodology I deployed during fieldwork was a response to the circumstances, the position I found myself in, in Mildura. The decision not to 'imagine' a community and then study it reflects the complex realities of rural life. Reissman observes that 'any methodological standpoint is, by definition, partial, incomplete, and historically contingent' (Reissman 1993: 70) and Abu-Lughod comments that 'the nature and quality of what anthropologists learn is profoundly affected by the unique shape of their fieldwork; this should be spelled out' (Abu-Lughod 1986: 10). Therefore this chapter describes Mildura, comments briefly on the local economy and social life of the town, and provides the frame story for the ethnography. Participant observation and the recording of personal narratives in life story or contextual interviews are discussed in this chapter while theoretical issues relating to the analysis of personal narratives are explored in Chapter Three.

Fieldwork in Mildura

I was originally interested in working in Mildura because of the history of the rural women's movement in Victoria and due to my interest in the comparatively under-researched lives of women working in viticulture or horticulture. My visiting scholars visa (which prohibited any paid work), and my interest in participant observation in the literal sense (Jackson 1983) inspired me to join 'WWOOF Australia' in order to work-for-

keep on a rural property.¹¹ A shoe-string research budget also meant that I had to plan to carry out fieldwork in a small town with respondents within cycling distance, as I could not afford to run a car during Fieldwork. I therefore looked in the WWOOF listings for Victoria, and found a commercial property in Mildura which looked as if the wwoof hosts might be receptive to the idea of a long term 'wwoofer' coming to stay. They advertised as:

Andrew Jones and Krystyna Schweizer. We are full time commercial producers of grapes, avocados, oranges and lemons, and are developing a market garden with a variety of vegies and herbs and keeping mixed poultry. We are 12km from Mildura, 7km from the Murray River and 2kms walk from an hourly bus service. We offer work training opportunities in all aspects of fruit production, handling and packing as well as irrigation and weeding. All share in household duties, 2 people indoors, no children, mainly vegetarian but flexible, no smoking. CONDITIONS from 15th Feb to end April (Grape Picking)—free accom, award wages, cooking facilities to people prepared to work 10-12 hours daily in 30-40 degree temperatures, provide and cook your own meals. Can take up to 16 people at that time.

From Edinburgh, I wrote to Andrew and Krystyna and asked if it would be possible to come and work as a long term wwoofer on their block as part of my PhD research. I told them that I was a 29 year old, non-smoking, meat-eating single female; and that I had wwoofed as a long term wwoofer on farms in Australia in 1988 and in New Zealand in 1989, and had agricultural and horticultural experience. I explained my work background in University-based policy research, that I was intending to carry out participant observation fieldwork, and that after several months of wwoofing I planned to be doing interviewing in the local community—the explicit research contract in this case, would be work for social experience.

When I arrived in Melbourne I contacted Andrew to confirm that he was content for me to go to his property, and then travelled on the train and bus up to Mildura. At the train station in Melbourne, the ticket vendor confirmed that I was sure I wanted to go *all the way* to Mildura, and I was later told that people outwith Mildura, 'think Mildura is very close to the edge of the earth.' However, it transpired that Mildura was only the furthest settlement away from the State Capital of Victoria (500k from Melbourne), and was located on the border of New South Wales and 150k from the South Australian Border (see Maps 1, 2 and 3). The town, described in Australia as a 'rural city,' sits on the Murray

¹¹ WWOOF: Willing Workers On Organic Farms. An international organisation which produces a listing of organic farms who will accept volunteer labourers who 'work for keep,' i.e. for food and accommodation. A farm on the listing is known as a 'wwoof farm,' the farmers as 'wwoof hosts,' and the volunteers as 'wwoofers.'

River close to the Murray Darling River junction, and is surrounded by an area known as 'Sunraysia,' promoted as 'Oasis Country' by the tourist industry, comprising of thousands of hectares of irrigation districts for growing citrus and 'vine fruits' (grapes). The districts are divided into 'blocks' (farms) worked by 'blockies' (male viticulturists and horticulturists), their wives ('the blocky's missus') and children as 'family farms,' or managed by an individual blocky on behalf of multinational wine producing corporations such as *Southcorp*. The 'Mildura Rural City Council' is the largest municipality in Victoria, covering an area of 22,330 square kilometres, and the 1996 Census showed a population of 40,644 living in the total municipality. The town was surrounded by the satellite settlements of Red Cliffs, Merbein and Irymple (see Map 3), and on the other side of the Murray River were the New South Wales villages of Wentworth and Dareton. The nearest major settlements in Victoria were Robinvale (60k) and Swanhill (224k). Broken Hill, where the *Mad Max* film series was filmed, lay 100k to the north in New South Wales, and Ouyen, a small farming town, 100k to the south. From the irrigation districts of Mildura the bush extends north and south-west into dryland farming areas—to the north, to Darling River station country, and to the southwest to the Mallee wheat farming district. The edges of these farming areas bordered the Mungo and Hattah-Kulkyne National Parks in the north and south respectively.

In a country where the population clings to the coastline, this is therefore a very inland thesis and the climate reflected the desert surroundings. Mildura is consistently the hottest location in the state, and I was often told that Mildura 'has more sunshine than the sunshine coast' (in Queensland). The weather was identical day after day during fieldwork with the clear blue skies, contrasting with the red soil, and in summer, the green of the vines. Winter differed from summer only in that the temperatures were lower, and there were only seven days of rain during the time I was in Mildura, which included 'the heatwave of 1997' with the temperature reaching over 40 degrees Celsius every day for a 10 day stretch, and temperatures of 33 degrees at 10.30pm.

Only one hour from Melbourne by plane, the road and rail journey to the State Capital involved a seven or eight hour trip by public transport. Two buses a day made the journey to Melbourne, and one bus departed at 4.30am daily to take travellers east over the Hay Plains to Cootamundra and then onwards to Canberra or Sydney. The train service from Melbourne terminated at Swanhill, and I was told that the recent cessation of the passenger train service to Mildura had created a sense of distance between Mildura and the outside world, breaking the ability of the railway to create a 'tangible link between

rural and urban life, hitching together the dissonant worlds of the country and the city' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 155).

White settlement in Sunraysia began in 1846, and Mildura was established as a colonial outpost in 1891 by George and William Chaffey, the 'Chaffey Brothers,' who set up an 'irrigation colony.' The 'pioneering' history of the town is documented in several publications: notably Mildura and District Historical Society Pamphlet (undated); The Sunraysia Daily (1970); The MacMillan Company of Australia Ltd. (1976); Ward (1988); Parsons (1990); Brunton (1991); Sunraysia Development Corporation (1995); and Chandler (1996).

Social science interest in the town began in the 1930s and 1940s as part of an intriguing Melbourne University series of 'social surveys' in rural Victoria, including McIntyre and McIntyre's *Country Towns of Victoria. A Social Survey* (1944), and Holt's *Wheat Farms of Victoria. A Sociological Survey* (1947). McIntyre also produced *A Social Survey of a Dried Fruits Area* (McIntyre 1948) detailing the results of a 'social survey' of 150 block households. It is likely that some of the people I met in Mildura were part of households that contributed to this survey, and the key themes arising from McIntyre's work, as noted through the thesis, show remarkable resonance with life in Mildura in the 1990s. More recently Hart (1986) commented on social issues in Mildura in the *Journal of Family Therapy*, and Vanclay, Mesiti and Howden conducted sociological research on 'Farming Styles' in Mildura in the mid 1990s (Vanclay et al. 1998).

The town of Mildura, and notably the Central Business District comprised of a town centre mixture of supermarket and chain stores, and independent small businesses. The town centre gave the impression of a thriving economy, and out of town development on the main road south from Mildura, with large Australian chain stores such as *Harvey Norman*, added to the metropolitan atmosphere in the town. Several local Government offices were located in Mildura, and a broad range of health and welfare services were available locally. There were also a number of schools, both State and fee paying, and a Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) college offering further education and degree courses in association with Victorian Universities.

Kapferer comments that 'country towns form one of the fundamental popular images of "Australian-ness", of community, and of social conservatism' (Kapferer 1990: 90) and Mildura civic organisations worked towards the town encapsulating these rural virtues. Civic organisations were well represented in the town with several branches of Rotary,

the Returned Services League, Apex, and other volunteer and charitable groups. The town had a number of Churches, the largest of which was the Catholic Church of Australia.

Sport was a central focus of life in Mildura, and the town boasted excellent sporting facilities, numerous football ovals, hockey fields, and tennis courts. There were several bars and restaurants in the town centre, the most popular of which was the Grand Hotel. The Mildura Working Man's Club—famous for having the longest bar in the world before the bar was redeveloped to accommodate gambling slot machines—had a restaurant which was popular with the blockies; and Doms and The Sandbar were two of three nightclubs in the town centre. Late night drinking in the bars and night clubs at times created a wild west atmosphere with regular brawls and street fighting, which contrasted with the more sophisticated civic events convened at the town's two museums, art gallery or theatre.

The Murray River was the main feature of the town, and radiating south and west from the river the suburbs of the town sprawled out across former irrigation districts—the original town centre streets with clapboard houses and corrugated iron roofs, spreading into public housing, large family homes, and finally giving way to sumptuous brick veneer 'executive' enclaves on the edge of the suburbs, cutting into the contemporary irrigation districts.

Some people described Mildura residents as the Victorian 'untouchables' and suggested that many people who lived there had a sense of being on 'different planet'—distant from both the rest of Victoria and the rule of law. Others said Mildura was an 'island' community, and the geographical isolation did seem to engender a sense of otherworldliness. Mildura was variously described to me as a 'lunar colony,' an 'island,' 'another world,' or a 'redneck colony.' The sense of Mildura being a community on the edge, set in borderland country, was also attractive to some. I always asked people how they came to be in Mildura and, in interview, one woman told me, 'I thought the industry up here was oranges, and I knew it was going to be hot. I thought it would be a new thing: why not go to the country and have an *adventure*?'

Okely (1994b: 26) notes the importance of newspapers and visual media to anthropological research, and in Mildura *The Sunraysia Daily* reported on the issues of the day. These included the memorable 'Fruit fly maggot red alert' (Sat December 7th 1997); regular reportage relating to rabbit and mouse plagues; 'Fire extensively damages car' (December 18th 1997), and even I appeared on the front page (see Appendix 2). Just as McIntyre and

McIntyre observed in 1944, the country newspaper still played an important role in generating local knowledge. McIntyre and McIntyre write:

It is hard for anyone who has not lived in a country town to realise how closely-knit is the web of personal knowledge. In a big city it is easy not to know what one's friends do with most of their spare time, not to know friends of their friends, never to have met their families, not to know what their fathers do for a livelihood. But in a country town this is impossible; all characteristics and activities appear against the background of detailed knowledge, and country newspapers, with what often seem lame and trivial accounts, add continually to the sum of this knowledge, and keep their readers' interest knitted in with its development (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 247).

The sense of isolation in Mildura, reinforced by the fiercely parochial focus of local newspapers, radio and television, led one respondent to tell me that she thought that there was little difference in the 1990s to when she was growing up in the 1940s, when 'our only connection to the world was through a crackly radio with batteries' as, even in the 1990s, communication channels from the 'outside world' in Mildura were relatively limited. Terrestrial television was restricted to three television channels, the Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC), the commercial Channel 9, and the ABC Special Broadcasting Service (Australia's National Multicultural Broadcaster). Satellite Television was available, and a second commercial channel, Channel 7 was introduced to Mildura in 1997. The commercial television Channel 9 carried predominantly sport interspersed with advertisements for Mildura-based firms, and was, I was told, the channel of choice for the 'average blocky.' At times, it seemed to me that little appeared to have changed since McIntyre's observation that:

Sunraysia growers do not often travel to more distant places, but the outside world impinges on their lives through newspapers, wireless, letters from relatives and friends, and in other ways (McIntyre 1948: 111).

The Economy in Mildura

'The land makes the city run' was a common observation amongst people I met, and the prosperity of Central Business District businesses was viewed as inextricably linked to productive harvests in the irrigation district, and dryland farming areas. Mildura's primary industries focused on export markets, with producers exporting oranges, grapes, avocaodes and asparagus directly to Korea, Japan, United States of America and Europe. As Gullestad observes, 'global process[es] directly or indirectly influence the everyday

lives of people all over the world' (Gullestad 1996b: 13). The burgeoning export market for the wine industry emphasised Mildura's place in a 'global trading environment,' and *Southcorp's* Karadoc technologically advanced winery (famously the '2nd largest winery in the southern hemisphere') was located less than twenty kilometres from the town.

At one time, Mildura produced between 80% and 95% of dried fruit production in Australia, but in the years shortly before my fieldwork, the majority of the blockies had switched away from dried vine fruits to producing grapes for wine companies. However, the Australian Dried Fruits Association (known as the ADFA since its establishment in 1904) had played an important role in the pioneering history of the town and, despite the collapse of the market, maintained a high profile in Mildura. The ADFA advertising and marketing campaigns promoted a romantic representation of the industry (and of the blockies working within the industry), and conversations with ADFA supporters often turned to the potential for the sector, and the ADFA, to be 'saved' by an imagined event such as *MacDonalds* introducing a 'raisin MacMuffin' into their fast-food range. The alleged presence of raisins in the European version of the *Cadbury's* Chocolate Picnic bar, and not in the Australian version, was also the subject of much debate.

Despite considerable diversification into alternative crops including avocados, asparagus, nuts, stone fruit and additional varieties of table grapes, and the drought affecting the Mallee dryland farmers in 1996 and 1997, the grape harvest remained the primary focus of attention in Mildura. While I was working on Andrew's block, many conversations revolved around discussion of 'this year's prices,' 'last year's prices,' 'last year's frosts,' and 'the prospects for this year's harvest.' During fieldwork, conversation about the state of the 96/97 grape harvest was apparently more intense than usual since a severe frost had damaged the 1997 crop, ultimately resulting in one of the lowest harvest yields in half a century.

Despite the introduction of mechanised picking at harvest time many growers still relied on teams of 'pickers.' This resulted in the town being flooded with pickers who picked for low wages in poor working conditions during the Australian late summer/autumn in February and March. The relationship between townspeople, blockies and the pickers was tense and distrustful—blockies complained about lazy and unreliable pickers, and pickers complained about the exploitative attitude of the blockies. Hostility towards the pickers would appear to have changed little over 50 years: in 1997 one blocky told me, for example, it was 'good that the pickers spent all their money on alcohol and drugs' because then 'at least the money stays in the town.' In 1948 McIntyre wrote:

About half the growers expressed complete satisfaction with their harvest workers. A third were dissatisfied for various reasons. 'Mostly the riff-raff from town—prostitutes, thieves, metho-drinkers who just come to Mildura for a holiday on a free rail ticket' was a typical comment of dissatisfied growers (McIntyre 1948: 85).

The environmental impact of the chemical-intensive grape production in Mildura was highlighted to me through joining the local Landcare Group¹² and speaking to organic farmers, but I was told that the majority of the population had few concerns about the environmental or human impact of the pesticides and herbicides used by the blockies. One woman told me that she had once attended a public meeting and spoken against the agri-chemical companies. She described her memory of the crowd response as like 'a group of men about to call for a lynching,' and recalled that she had to be escorted from the hall by a government official.

I was told that the other main industry in the town was the tourist industry, although opinion expressed to me was divided on the real significance of 'tourism dollars' to the local economy, with some concurring with Kapferer who observed in 1990 that 'in many ways, the Australian boom in the tourist industry has elements of a cargo cult, with state governments and the Federal Government vying for the dollars and yen of Pacific rim tourists' (Kapferer 1990: 104). Other respondents queried the official version of the local economy, suggesting to me that the total income derived from statutory (welfare) payments in Mildura was higher than the total income derived from the vine fruits industry. In addition, several respondents discussed the importance of the cash economy generated by marijuana production in Mildura.¹³

The isolation, the sense of being a colony, and a border and frontier town, informed the discourses about life in Mildura amongst the people I met. What some respondents suggested was merely a 'veneer' of urban, metropolitan sophistication, was viewed by many as obscuring a more 'authentic,' 'redneck,' (and racist) rural heart to the town. Tensions identified by McIntyre in the 1940s were still evident today, and the attitudes towards the 7% of blockies of 'non-British origins' he recorded in his social survey, were repeated to me in 1996-7:

¹² Landcare is a nation-wide government sponsored conservation movement in Australia, see for example, Campbell (1994), Lubczenko (1994), Hogan and Cumming (1997).

¹³ Cf. Cocklin et al. (1999), who have published on the economic significance of cannabis production in rural New Zealand.

Almost all of these [blockies of non-British origins] are now naturalised as British subjects, but they are still regarded as foreigners and outsiders by most of the remainder of the population, because of their different ways of living and working, and often because of their poor knowledge of English. Certain organizations refuse to accept them as members. The prejudice is strongest against Italians and Yugo-slavs; Greeks and Northern Europeans are more acceptable; but one sometimes finds a strong dislike even of English migrants (McIntyre 1948: 73 emphasis added).

McIntyre and McIntyre commented in 1944 on the need for 'National Clubs' in country towns for those of non-British birth who were 'largely shut out from the ordinary social life of the town' (1944: 193) and the continued demand for these clubs in the 1990s in Mildura, belied the positive national discourse of multiculturalism.¹⁴ The 'discursive dissonance' in Australia which Marcus comments on in 1988, was also evident in Mildura:

On the one hand, there is a discourse on equality and human rights which has led to legislation that is being enforced by the legal institutions. On the other, there is a popular discourse which is fundamental, a structural, symbolic and institutional racism which is critical to settler Australian notions of identity and selfhood (Marcus 1988: 4).

In Mildura, as Schaffer observes at a national level, some were regarded as more Australian than others:

In Australia, all native-born or naturalized citizens, including Aborigines, may be 'Australians' by law but some people can identify more closely with the category of the 'real' Australian than others. At least some women, Aborigines and immigrant Australians from non-Anglo-Irish backgrounds resist identification with the national type, although they no doubt recognize its existence as a dominant cultural norm. The way the category is constructed within a dominant order of power relations deserves our attention (Schaffer 1988: 12).

As discussed in Chapter Seven, racial tensions placed immigrant rural women in double jeopardy (see also Andreoni 1989, Misztal 1991, Kelly 1994, Reeve 1994, and Immigrant Women's Speakout Association of New South Wales, 1996), and during fieldwork, barely concealed racial and ethnic tensions in Mildura were exacerbated by local wilful misinterpretation of the Wik decision on native title, and the activities of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in Mildura in July 1997.

¹⁴ For further discussion of Multiculturalism in Australia see, for example, Beckett (1995), Harvey (1994), Lo Bianco (1995), de-Lepervanche (1991).

It was my experience that privately expressed views about the Aboriginal community by blockies (which I and the European wwoofers I worked with thought was a very disturbing aspect of Mildura social discourse) appeared to have changed little from those expressed to McIntyre and McIntyre in 1944, who commented:

The Australian aborigines, who present no economic competition, for they are only used when labour is very scarce, are not hated. They are despised, good-humouredly: 'You can't expect them to learn anything. They're really just like animals.' Generally speaking, in the few districts where there are any number of them, there is very little sense of responsibility towards them. When the girls are prostituted by white men the community reaction is not against the latter, but is expressed in such a comment as: 'The blacks are like that, they don't know any better' (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 265).

People rarely spoke to me about feeling part of a 'community' in Mildura, and during fieldwork it seemed that a sense of belonging (Cohen 1982) was replaced by communities of interest or affiliation, around charitable groups or sports clubs, and a sense of being somehow enmeshed, but not bound, by a web of local knowledge, and friendship networks. For example, one of the women I met who was relatively new to Mildura told me, 'I've met lots of individual people but none of the people come together.' Gossip, however, was a unifying force, and one woman told me that she was at ease in the town because she said:

You feel comfortable. That's something you miss in the city. [In the city] Nobody knows you and you sort of have to explain yourself all the time. Here you don't have to explain yourself, people know you better than you do [know yourself].

Or, as another respondent observed, 'people here are always up for a slather of talking.'

The intense level of intimate local knowledge, which McIntyre and McIntyre described as 'the essence of country town life; it is information and personal' (1944: 33) and the way in which it was articulated, is of critical significance to this ethnography. There was an inordinate amount of knowledge circulating about individuals in the town, and yet social life was carried on *as if* one was not aware of this wealth of background knowledge and life story information. For example, one evening during the last week of my fieldwork, I was walking with a friend near the river and we were passed by a young male runner. I said 'hello' as he passed, and he said 'hello,' and my friend who lived in the town, asked me who he was. From social interactions that were simply social interactions, and that I had not written down for my research, or as part of any interview, I was able to tell her the runner's life and family history. I had met him only once and exchanged pleasantries about my research and his work, but could tell my friend about his career aspirations,

detailed information about his personal life and most recent relationships, his parent's marriage, their extra-marital affairs and divorce, and other information about his siblings, who I had never met, and who no longer lived in Mildura. My friend said how interesting that was and we carried on with our walk. It was not until later that I reflected that if I as a temporary resident knew so much, how much more intimate knowledge must be circulating in the community. On another occasion, someone who I had met in passing once at a social event, came and chatted to me in the Mildura Post Office queue on a Tuesday morning, and again I wondered how it was that I already knew the intimate details of her extra-marital tryst on the previous Friday night. Again little seemed to have changed since 1944:

Because of the personal nature of country towns any immorality which does take place is talked about to a very great extent, with the result that after half an hour's listening the city dweller is apt to think that the country town is an exceedingly wicked place (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 267).

During fieldwork I found that, in a very broad sense, the view amongst people I met was that in Mildura the quality of life open to individuals and families with good wages, and equitable marriages, was unquestioned. This thesis, however, explores reflections of change in family life, and the situation for women in Mildura that I met during fieldwork which raised questions about gender equity, work and children's rights, domestic violence, and access to justice for women. However this perspective was, and will no doubt remain, muted in Mildura. I was told by respondents that the 'Civic Fathers' in Mildura preferred to think of the town as 'clean,' a place where 'country folk remain the ideal—typical Australians ... clean-living, morally upright, egalitarian individualists, straightforward, uncomplicated, unpolluted and ultimately noble' (Kapferer 1990: 100). For example, despite the presence of a heavily used drug and alcohol centre, an AIDS support group, a domestic violence shelter, and a sexual assault unit, one woman summarised the views of the 'Civic Fathers' of the town by saying:

If you talk to some of the Councillors, there's no drugs here, there's no AIDS, there's no sexual abuse. There is a line around Mildura where it doesn't get it. I don't know where that is, but they do. We've had a lot of problems trying to educate councillors in the past.

The Fieldwork Experience

When I first arrived in Mildura, Andrew, a bearded not unattractive short stocky man in his mid 40s, met me off the bus from Melbourne and, during the drive to his block, he told

me that contrary to what it said in the wwoof listings, he was 'separated at the moment,' as his wife had 'not been able to cope with farm life,' and she now lived nearby with their son Jesse. Wwoofing arrangements at Andrew's place were that wwoofers stayed in the pickers quarters the original corrugated iron block house, but cooked, ate, and watched television, with Andrew in the spacious 1964 brick veneer farm house that had been built to replace the original block house.

Andrew had been born and brought up on the block which was cleared and settled by his grandfather in the 1920s, and after his father passed away when he was 17, he worked with his mother on the block until he married Krystyna, and his mother retired to a house in the Mildura suburbs. Andrew worked on the block with his unpaid elderly male farm worker Clary¹⁵ who lived year round rent-free in a second set of purpose-built pickers quarters on the block. Jesse came over to the block to stay at weekends and occasional weekday evenings when, Andrew told me, Krystyna 'couldn't cope' with him, as Jesse was 'a bit of a handful.' Meanwhile, Krystyna stayed two kilometres away in a small prefabricated cabin from which she ran her millinery business. Krystyna was originally from Switzerland and was tiny and vivacious, describing herself on our first meeting as 'ethnic,' and looking much younger than her 48 years. She also, it emerged, had twogrown up daughters who were now aged 21 and 22, and lived in Melbourne with their father, an Italian-Australian Krystyna had met and married in Mildura 25 years ago.

During my time on the block, work fell into a regular routine, with long working days on the block (generally tending to vines, picking and packing avocados and table grapes, and weeding) with a short lunch break. Saturdays were half days with lunch in Mildura with two of Andrew's 'mates' Bryan and Noel, and I had occasional trips to town if Andrew had to travel in, and some nights out with Andrew, Bryan and Noel to the cinema or the Workingmen's Club. In the meantime, I made friends with Krystyna and, providentially as I was a competent seamstress, on the two days of Australian spring rain that fell while I was working at Andrew's, I went over to her cabin to sew with her, and cycled over to chat and socialise with her during some evenings.

The arrangements on the block initially seemed reasonable, and offered me good participant observation experience in an interesting business. Although the hours of work were longer than I anticipated, Andrew was friendly, and it was only 2k to Irymple, and

¹⁵ The presence of an unpaid 'Farm Man' was apparently commonplace in the past, and is mentioned in Holt (1947: 47). During fieldwork no one questioned why Clary was neither paid, nor claimed welfare payments.

12k to cycle in to any events I wanted to attend in Mildura. I had found time to make good local contacts in the Landcare group, the Country Women's Association (CWA), the Business and Professional Women's Club (BPW), and I was helping out one morning a week at Jesse's primary school. Jesse's often outlandish and violent behaviour was the only thing I initially found challenging when working on Andrew's block.

In December, Krystyna asked me if I would be interested in helping her sell hats if she went to one of the New Year folk festivals in Victoria or Queensland. Andrew and Jesse were spending Christmas in Melbourne, and so I readily agreed, and made a 3,500k round trip over Christmas and New Year travelling to Queensland with Krystyna to the Woodford Maleny Folk Festival to sell hats. Over two days driving all day there and back, pulling a trailer piled high with hats and hat stands, and trading on the stall, I talked with Krystyna about her life, her business, and concerns about Jesse. It transpired that Jesse had been diagnosed as a child with 'ADDH' (Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity).¹⁶ Krystyna told me that he was being medicated with Ritalin,¹⁷ and that he did not take the Ritalin when he came to the block as Andrew disapproved of the medication, an explanation which went some way to explain Jesse's behaviour.

After New Year other wwoofers, including Tobias from East Germany, arrived to work on the block and, as the harvest season approached, Andrew's priorities for management changed. As the weeks passed the working days became longer, and Andrew's contribution to cooking (the only shared household task) fell away. After a full days work for all of us, we fell into a routine during the evenings of me cooking, the other wwoofers washing up, and Andrew watching television. Over New Year Krystyna had made the offer that during harvest (February to March) I could wwoof for her making hats for the 'Womad' world music Festival in Adelaide, and doing some childcare, rather than wwoofing for Andrew. I was keen to do this as I did not want to work illegally (wwoofers were paid during the harvest) and did not want the prolonged exposure to the sun that harvest involved. After a number of 'events' (Hastrup 1987), I was relieved to be able to move off Andrew's block permanently at the start of harvest and went to live in a caravan behind Krystyna's prefabricated cabin.

¹⁶ See Green and Chee (1995).

¹⁷ Ritalin is the brand name for methylphenidate a mild central nervous system stimulant commonly prescribed to children with ADDH. Where children are prescribed Ritalin as part of a long-term therapy programme 'drug holidays' are recommended i.e. withholding the drug on weekends and during school holidays in as much as the clinical situation permits (www.mentalhealth.com March 2001).

Although Jesse's behaviour was much better when with his mother, after less than a week at Krystyna's I found her, very unusually, in tears sitting at the kitchen table after she had taken Jesse to school. Krystyna was beside herself over Jesse's latest behaviour, and after recounting what Jesse had done, she sat at the kitchen table, with her head in her hands saying to me 'if I go and tell someone this they say I am the crazy one.' I simply said that to me Jesse's behaviour did not seem like that described as ADDH in the books and videos she had loaned to me, and asked what the Doctors thought. I offered to go with Krystyna to see the local paediatrician, who then reluctantly arranged an appointment for Jesse with a child psychiatrist in Melbourne; and I then worked with Krystyna to compile an 8,000 word report for the child psychiatrist detailing Jesse's life history and behaviours.¹⁸

The Melbourne specialist who received this report was the leading child psychiatrist in Victoria and diagnosed Jesse as a child with Asperger's Syndrome—an autism spectrum disorder—and was apparently stunned that Jesse had reached 9 years of age with no professional recognition of his condition. Jesse was later described by Chris Attwood (Attwood 1994 and 1998) to Krystyna during time she spent in Queensland as a 'text book' case.¹⁹

I stayed wwoofing with Krystyna until May when it became too cold and damp during the evenings of a desert winter to live in Krystyna's caravan any longer. I then advertised for a house sharing arrangement at the hospital and the local social work agency, and arranged to stay in the suburbs of Mildura with a local social worker for the rest of my time in Mildura. When living in Mildura, I kept in close touch and regularly visited Krystyna and Jesse, and continued to attend CWA and BPW and Landcare events. In addition to the ongoing participant observation, I carried out a series of interviews, described below, in June, July and August 1997.

¹⁸ Whereas this could be seen as an example of a 'prominent [ethical concern] in research on sensitive topics: specifically, how to handle research participants' requests for or obvious need of help or assistance' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 178) I concur with Renzetti and Lee who go on to comment 'Whereas traditionally, methodological texts view requests for help as impediments to research and advise against complying with them, feminist researchers "have questioned the moral implications of withholding needed information" (Cook and Fonow, 1984; see also Oakley, 1981; Reinhartz, 1992)' (ibid.: 178).

¹⁹ The main clinical features of Asperger's Syndrome are lack of empathy; naive, inappropriate, one-sided interaction; little or no ability to form friendships; pedantic, repetitive speech; poor non-verbal communication; intense absorption in certain subjects; clumsy and ill-coordinated movements and odd postures (Attwood 1998: 15).

The weekend of the funeral of the Princess of Wales in September 1997 marked my last weekend in Mildura.²⁰ I then left Mildura, and spent the last six weeks of fieldwork in Australia wwoofing on a farm in Rutherglen (in north-east Victoria) owned by a farmer I had met en route to Wagga Wagga. From there I travelled to attend rural women's gatherings in Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia.²¹

Establishing a Research Identity and Research Ethics

When travelling to the field, my expectations of fieldwork were tempered by six years of qualitative research work in rural Scotland with periods of extended fieldwork away from home. In contrast to anthropological accounts of 'blundering ... gaffes and near misses' (Atkinson 1990: 106) for me, establishing a credible research identity was straightforward in that I could show respondents the type of research reports I had produced in the past—for example, Shucksmith et al. (1994), Clark (1995), Slee et al. (1996)—and explain to my respondents how my PhD research was different. The high profile of the ABC Rural Woman of the Year Award lent legitimacy to my research, as did the progressive policies for women in Australia. However, many of the women I worked with in Mildura said how interesting my research time with them had been, because as I had been learning about their lives, they had been learning about the progressive policies they had hitherto been unaware of (see also Chapter Eight). I also produced a flyer outlining my research objectives in lay terms (see Appendix 3), and always passed on contact details for myself in Mildura, and for when I returned to Edinburgh.

Correspondence by letter, fax, (and email when I visited Charles Sturt University), with friends and family in Scotland kept me up to date on events at home, and just as I was told news in Mildura, I traded stories of love affairs, broken hearts and inappropriate marriages or liaisons from Edinburgh and beyond. In retrospect, a key methodological advantage was having stories, rather than gifts to trade, something which Renzetti and Lee refer to as 'self-disclosure' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 177). Talking to people in Mildura

²⁰ Diana's death had a major impact in Australia. Australia effectively observed a week of mourning—in Mildura a book of condolences was opened in the Mildura library, and flowers laid by the plaque which commemorated the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales to Mildura in 1985. I gathered with fieldwork friends to watch her funeral, which was broadcast live on television networks across Australia.

²¹ As part of the Alston and Wilkinson project on women in agricultural leadership (see Alston and Wilkinson 1998).

developed into networks and friendships, and access to fieldwork respondents and informants flowed in a straightforward way from that.

When I was wwoofing, the research bargain was clear: work for keep with the possibility of using some examples of block life to illustrate research themes, and I had long discussions about my research with Krystyna and Andrew. When participating with groups I emphasised that I might use group experiences to illustrate something about the group, for example the CWA branch supporting the local Domestic Violence Unit, and in the interviews I carried out, the interview respondents were given specific assurances regarding confidentiality (see Appendix 5 and Appendix 7, and below).

When I moved into the Mildura suburbs to house-share with the social worker (who had studied Social Anthropology as part of his University degree) I emphasised that he and his friends, and any conversations we had as house mates, would not be part of my research. Stead comments in her thesis 'for me both friend and informer are inadequate, *because friends don't record their conversations*, and 'informant' suggests a detachment and objectivity that I felt would be both undesirable and impossible in my research situation' (Stead 1997: 153 emphasis added). I did not write down conversations with people I was 'friends' and socialised with, and I would contest Brettell's assertion that the method of participation necessarily means that 'confidences become data' (Brettell 1993: 11). In this ethnography I generally refer to research 'respondents' because people were in effect 'responding' to my questions and presence.

Participant Observation

I expected to work throughout fieldwork, and ventured to Australia equipped for months of farm work, rather than the more diverse experience fieldwork turned into. Okely comments that in contrast to university existence, 'practical and manual skills may be greatly valued' (Okely 1975: 184) in the field, but it was my experience that 'university' skills of report writing and administration proved to be as useful in my particular fieldwork context. However, I was guided by Okely's premise that the anthropologist must be *disponible* :

The anthropologist, despite months of literature reviews, possibly years of theoretical and comparative reading, will have to eject hypotheses like so much ballast. The people may not live as recorded ... documentation a distortion or deflection from the outsider's gaze. The ethnographer must, like

a surrealist, be *disponible* (cf. Breton 1937), and open to *objets trouvés*, after arriving in the field (Okely 1994a: 19).

I was therefore engaged in a stream of activities including the monthly meetings of the Carinya branch of the Country Women's Association, Business and Professional Women's Group and Landcare Group; and attending a seemingly endless round of CWA lunches, Song and Costume events, Garden Parties, Craft Days and other events such as a Farm Safety Day. By the end of fieldwork, I was as likely to be drinking mid-afternoon sherry with Octogenarian Past Presidents of the various Mildura Bowling Clubs reminiscing over Past Presidents of the 1940s and 1950s, as drinking whisky with late twenty year olds in a Mildura bar. Even time away from Mildura involved working with other people, either on the farm in Rutherglen helping out with the gourmet dinner bed and breakfast business on the farm, or working with researchers from Wagga Wagga University at the rural women's gatherings.

During my last months of fieldwork in Mildura I also attended three of the monthly meetings of the patchwork and quilting group, and went along to a month of Mildura Youth Club young women's group weekly meetings. Members of all of the groups I became involved with were extremely warm, friendly, and welcoming, and also made the most of the opportunity to use me as a guest speaker at events, and recommend me as a speaker to other groups. I therefore gave talks about my research work to the Mildura Ladies Past Presidents Bowling Club, two Rotary Groups, TAFE students and the Victorian Farmers Federation Ouyen branch. I was also the official opening speaker at the CWA Group Conference, and guest speaker at both a *Women In Rice Growing* field trip (see Appendix 4); and at a local primary school assembly, where fortunately the children had a greater interest in the Loch Ness Monster and Scottish Castles than my research. In addition, it seemed to be normal practice for people to ask me to 'say a few words' about what I was doing in Australia, even at the most ordinary of events.

Although speaking was a principle part of my fieldwork experience, speech in my research methodology was not necessarily privileged, and as Okely observes fieldwork was 'a total bodily experience, not one merely dependent on verbal accounts' (Okely 1994a: 61). Concurring with Hastrup and Hervik who suggest that 'most of the relevant [fieldwork] information is non-verbal and cannot be 'called up,' but has to be experienced as performed' (Hastrup and Hervik 1994: 3), I aimed to follow Jackson in order to:

Adopt a methodological strategy of joining in without ulterior motive and literally putting oneself in the place of another person: inhabiting their

world. Participation thus becomes an end in itself rather than a means of gathering closely-observed data which will be subject to interpretation elsewhere after the event (Jackson 1983: 340).

In this way, I would suggest that understanding 'remains grounded in a field of practical activity and thereby remains consonant with the experience of those among whom one has lived' (Jackson 1983: 341). The ethnography was informed not only by me being there but also by my *being in the way* in quotidian domestic events and episodes, which 'because actions speak louder and more ambiguously than words ... are more likely to lead us to common truths' (Jackson 1983: 339). Being involved in the *habitus*²² of domestic life meant that:

Knowledge was embodied through sight, taste, sound, touch and smell. Bodily movement, its vigour, stillness or unsteadiness, was absorbed. Spoken utterances, especially the brief and seemingly banal, made greater and profounder sense when placed in a broader, learned context (Okely 1994a: 45).

The 'broader, learned context' was particularly useful when I was interviewing women because, as Okely experienced, I was often talking to women about their changing circumstances and 'the context from which they had emerged' (Okely 1994a: 45). I would suggest that my experience was similar to that of Okely, who comments:

My vicarious experience was to be exploited to reconstruct and relive their own. It only needed a few key words or remarks to conjure up their memories and to imagine mutual knowledge (Okely 1994a: 52).

The fieldwork experience was, of course, eased by the fact I was working in my own language, and with narrative schemes derived from broadly the same paradigms. In contrast to anthropologists working in a foreign language who, according to Campbell 'by the end of a couple of years ... should be following most of what's going on' (Campbell 1989: 16), I was working in an environment of shared 'ordinary language competence,' which as Mishler argues is a precondition for the approach I took to this ethnography. Mishler writes:

Questioning and answering are ways of speaking that are grounded in and depend on culturally shared and often tacit assumptions about how to express and understand beliefs, experiences, feelings, and intentions. I have referred

²² The work *disposition* seems particularly suited to express what is covered by the concept of *habitus* (defined as a system of dispositions). It expresses first the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning close to that of words such as *structure*; it also designates a *way of being*, a *habitual state* (especially of the body) and, in particular, a *predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination*' (Bourdieu 1977: 214).

to this knowledge as ordinary language competence ... the ordinary language competence shared by investigators and respondents is a critical but unrecognized precondition for effective research practice (Mishler 1986: 07).

Interviewing

I arranged opportunities for interviews with the people I met in Mildura because I was interested in the contrast between the personal narratives spoken in public or in conversation, and the personal narratives provided in an interview situation. I also wanted to create an opportunity to ask questions to women which could not arise in everyday conversation.

Interviewing was never a numbers game and, like Okely describing her research with gypsies, I 'was not under pressure as is a pollster interviewer to find select individuals and then hurry on after each interview' (Okely 1994b: 25). Despite assuring people that participant observation was hugely informative, many respondents thought out loud that they 'hoped I was learning something from just coming along to their meetings and events,' and 'interviewing' was seen by many of the people I met in Mildura as the moment when I 'started research.' Respondents were therefore anxious to ensure that I had interviewed enough people; spoken to all the appropriate people; and interviewed a sufficiently wide range of people, and regularly volunteered themselves, or volunteered others to 'be interviewed.'

I regarded interviews as 'a jointly constructed discourse' (Mishler 1986: v) and very much assumed that I would be interviewing in situations where the respondents 'asked back' (Oakley 1981: 30). Interviews were semi structured and designed to draw a narrative response, and my research project itself provided the 'theme' (Angrosino 1989a) around which respondents personal narratives were structured. With the exception of two days when I drove a hire car to outlying properties, all my respondents lived within cycling distance of Mildura, and I presented the interviewing to them as 'contextual,' or 'life story' or 'respondent' interviewing.

For the contextual interviews I first approached 19 people (6 men and 13 women) from government organisations, local industry representatives, non-governmental organisations and representatives of Churches, who would provide both what I described as 'contextual' information relating to service provision and delivery (these were issues my respondents very much expected me to be interested in, and in the event the interviews were

fascinating). In the interviews I asked respondents about their perceptions of life in the town; what they considered to be the key issues for women in the town; and about specific issues that had arisen during my participant observation in relation to domestic violence, access to justice, farm safety and environmental issues. The people I asked to interview, their approximate age, marital status, organisation, and how we met, are shown in Appendix 5. The contextual interviewees were selected by snowballing, through personal contacts in the field, or through approaching the relevant organisation for a contact person to approach.

Before interview, I sent all the potential contextual respondents a letter (see Appendix 6) and my research flyer, and then followed that up with a phone call to arrange a time to meet. The interviews took place in respondents' homes or offices, and lasted for approximately an hour. All interviews were tape recorded.

When the contextual interviews were complete, I asked individual women from the groups I had been involved with (CWA, BPW, Landcare, the Patchwork group, and some dryland farming women) if they would be prepared to be interviewed about their lives. I also approached other women I had met, or who had been recommended as individuals I should interview (for example a former state finalist of the Rural Woman of the Year award), and eventually completed 32 life story interviews.²³ The women I invited to interview, their approximate age, marital status, and how we met are shown in Appendix 7, and even though I knew most of the women socially, I went through the same formalised recruitment process as for the contextual respondents (see Appendix 8). In attempting to describe how these women are related to each other, I turn to Gullestad's explication of how she regarded the women who contributed to her study in urban Norway:

The women studied do not make up a community or a partial network for other purposes than my fieldwork. Since several of the women are connected, it gave me all the same the opportunity to study family and network processes. They are not a sample, but rather reference points or "peepholes" from which to get information about a culture and a way of life. They are natural cogs in the machinery of my analysis. The analysis is about a social and cultural universe. The total population studied is far larger than the reference women. Together these persons and their activities make up the basis of the generalizations in the study (Gullestad 1984: 46).

²³ The ethnography reflects that only five of these respondents had no connection to primary industries. All other respondents had either grown up on a block or farm, or been married to a blocky or dryland farmer.

I would not necessarily describe the women I interviewed as representative, but following Roos, I would consider suggesting that their personal narratives were 'typical' of accounts of married life and intermittent resistance in Mildura. In discussing his life history work in Finland, he writes about his sample in the following way:

It is not representative, but it is certainly typical: one is bound to find in the material several different types of typical stories. Whether they are in correct proportion to their actual distribution in the population, is another matter. But for discussing problems like the one I am taking up in this paper, the material is perfectly suited (Roos 1987: 8 emphasis added).

The interviews took place in the women's homes over kitchen tables, in the sitting room, or outside on the veranda, or where I was living in Mildura in the sitting room if that was more convenient for the women. Like the contextual interviews all interviews were tape recorded, and usually lasted for 90 minutes. The interviews were conversational, favoured chronicity, and centred around expectations of life in Mildura; expectations of married and working life; experiences of parenting and raising children; challenges for women; membership of women's groups and social changes; and the women's thoughts on the impact of the State and Federal Government's policies and initiatives for women, on their lives. The interviews were more informal than the contextual interviews, and one interview involved following the farmer around her property performing a series of urgent tasks on the farm, with me rolling the tape and asking her questions about her life. I always started the interview by emphasising that we could stop at any time; anything the women did not want to talk about, I was happy to move on from; and that at any time, I could stop the tape if they wanted to stop, or stop the tape if they wanted to say something, but not on tape. Throughout the interviewing phase of my research, I felt it was critical that none of the women ever felt exposed or at risk through the interview process. In contrast to Okely who notes that her detailed research material on 75 families or domestic units 'was obtained without a clip-board' (Okely 1994b: 25) I felt that the clip board and tape recorder set clear boundaries for the women, and assured them of their rights to confidentiality and anonymity (see Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth 1999). Moreover I concur with Langness who comments:

Ethnographic data should not be acquired secretly, nor published without a subject's consent, no matter how remote the possibility seems that it might cause harm. Moreover, an informant's agreement to divulge certain information is not a license to publish other kinds of data revealed in the process (Langness 1981: 129).

It was common knowledge in Mildura who I had interviewed as part of my research, but respondents were assured that no individual's comments would be identified in any research output, and any quotations used would not be attributable. I also assured respondents that on completion of all research output from my PhD studies, the tapes (which I catalogued and partially transcribed²⁴ after I returned to Edinburgh) would be destroyed, and that no one would be allowed to listen to the tapes apart from me.²⁵ I did not make transcripts or tapes available to the respondents as it was not practicable, and I made it clear from the outset, that providing tapes was not part of the research bargain—the time and negotiation which would be involved in the production of unedited stories or presentation of particular respondent's personal narratives (with exception of Krystyna), was something beyond the scope of PhD research.

Dossa observes that:

Critical anthropology, where life stories are given central place, recognizes the importance of the emotional resonance of the narrators and brings to the center the moot question of the relationship of the narrator and the ethnographer (Dossa 1994: 344).

Implicit in the thesis, and a cornerstone of my approach in the field, was the creation of an emotional resonance between myself and my respondents. My genuine fascination with the stories of my respondents lives did, I would suggest, create a resonance in interview, a phenomenon described in Burgos's account of the successful narration of a life story. She writes:

I believe that the life story comes off successfully when its narrator exercises her power upon the person who is ostensibly conducting the interview by derealising his interventions; capturing his attention, neutralising his will, arousing his desire to learn something else, or something more, than what would be allowed by the logic of the narrative itself. I have several times been through such an experience: a well-conducted narrative reverses the power relationship which, at the beginning of the process of eliciting the narrative, sets the initiator of interaction and owner of cultural capital (as little as this may be), in relation to someone who is not an owner at all (or perhaps the owner of another kind of cultural capital, not relevant here). Hearing a 'good' lifestory, one just wants to listen and understand (in French, the word 'entendre' contains both these meanings) and not to ask questions at

²⁴ It is perhaps appropriate to note that 'taping and transcribing are absolutely essential to narrative analysis' (Reissman 1993: 56), and that 'transcribing discourse, like photographing reality, is an interpretive practice ... by displaying text in particular ways, we provide grounds for our arguments, just like a photographer guides the viewer's eye with lenses and by cropping images' (ibid.: 13). Extracts from personal narratives presented in this ethnography are presented as 'cleaned' speech (ibid.: 40).

²⁵ See ASA 1999 regarding research participants' intellectual property rights.

all; the pleasure of listening removes the *volonte de savoir*. The form captures both the narrator and the 'implied reader' (*narrataire*); but is the narrator who becomes the master of the game, even if s/he did not invent the rules (Burgos 1989: 33).

As is explored in later chapters, the Mildura Stories redefined my fieldwork experience and my understanding of some of the women's lives as I had previously understood them simply through social interaction. In some cases, interviewing made fieldwork make sense. Some women were practised in telling their life stories, others were nervous about their ability to 'answer the questions' they imagined I had prepared. It was also a closed process—I did not discuss the interviews with the women after the event, and did not follow up issues that were left open ended by the interviews.

Following Edwards who comments:

The aim of a feminist inquiry must be to provide explanations of women's lives that are useful to them as an instrument to improve their situations. An aim of such research is therefore to ensure that women's experiences are not objectified and treated merely as research fodder (Edwards 1993: 184),

I would concur with Campbell's assertion that 'The most worthwhile audience for ... ethnography should be those friends in the Amazon forest [the field] I am writing about' (Campbell 1989: 165). Therefore the research bargain for everyone who was interviewed was that I would send them all a copy of research findings—a summary which I produced for a lay readership (see Appendix 9)—and a research report (Clark 1998, see Appendix 10), which was mailed out to respondents in Australia in the Scottish Autumn of 1998. Brettell's edited collection (1993) queries what happens when 'they' (the respondents) read what 'we' (the anthropologists) write. However, in the work I have done in Scotland I have only ever written what I know 'they' will be likely to read, and saw no reason to do otherwise in Australia.

During 1998 and 1999 I also sent research summaries to the rural women's network magazines, CWA, BPW, FAAW and AWIA publications, and *The Sunraysia Daily*; and I was also interviewed by ABC Radio about the results of my research on World Rural Women's Day, October 15th 1998.

Sensitive Research

Okely comments that 'the open ended approach allows space for the previously unimagined' (Okely 1994a: 28), and in Australia my fieldwork experience with Krystyna was certainly not what I had imagined or planned. The research I was involved in was 'sensitive research,' defined by Renzetti and Lee as:

The threatening character of the research, and its potential consequences for both researcher and researched, suggest that *a sensitive topic is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched the collection, holding, and/or dissemination of research data* (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 05 original emphasis).

I would suggest that most participant observation means that the anthropologist is inevitably embroiled in 'sensitive research' defined in its broadest sense, and perhaps sensitive research is better understood as research which deals 'with behaviour that is intimate, discreditable, or incriminating' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: ix). As noted by Renzetti and Lee (1993: 30) and Bergen (1993: 204), recruitment for sensitive research topics would conventionally be amongst people who had publicly sought assistance relating to the research issue in question, via carefully managed negotiation with gatekeepers. In this case, domestic violence was a topic I almost stumbled over—in Mildura domestic violence was initially introduced by the announcement at the first CWA meeting I attended that they would be collecting Christmas gifts again this year for the domestic violence and sexual assault unit; and would the ladies please think of giving children's toys, talcum powder, and nice shampoos and soaps, as the women at the shelter often had to leave home in a hurry. Domestic violence was then raised in personal narratives, and in conversation (see Chapter Seven). Renzetti and Lee, referring to Brewer's work in their edited collection on sensitive research, note that the researcher needs to bring 'a tough, single-minded tenacious but pragmatic attitude to the [sensitive research] task' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 10), but in this case (as discussed in the ethnography) I think what came to be my matter-of-fact approach to the issue, simply mirrored the pragmatism of the women I met.

Some of my respondents also suggested that respecting the 'privacy of the family' in research protected men, rather than women and children, as it seemed to these respondents that in Mildura there was a common sense understanding that men should be permitted to act as they pleased in their own homes (see Chapter Four and Seven). The perspective of these women suggests that Corrin's remarks are particularly relevant to life in Mildura:

Aspects of the 'privacy' of family life can assume importance in non-feminist considerations both in that family members could be assumed to have rights to behave as they please in their own home and that families can solve their own problems without outside interference.... Racism within police forces, social services and the judiciary seriously affects the outcome of intervention within peoples' homes and lives. *Assumptions from limited, non-feminist perspectives still often shape men's and women's thoughts on how to assess and deal with violent situations* (Corrin 1996: 25-26 emphasis added).

Whilst recognising that some things are better left unsaid, and noting from the outset that this is a self-censored thesis, I would also, however, highlight the danger that in censoring this work (to some extent in anticipation of reader's sensibilities) we are contributing to a process where we depend on victims of violence and abuse alone to be 'the bearers of the silence' (Campbell 1998: 223).

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed methodological issues and described the local context for the following ethnography. The methodology has proved to be of particular importance in explicating contribution the thesis makes to a broader understanding and illumination of some aspects of the domestic lives of women working in viticulture and horticulture in Mildura.

Chapter Three now turns to a consideration of academic analysis and engagement with personal narratives, and emphasises the importance of the feminist perspective and interpretations of personal narratives for this thesis. The chapter also discusses the illocutionary power of words and the foregrounding of Krystyna's personal narratives in the thesis, and how 'marginal voices ... both challenge the centre and also show its form' (Okely 1996: 214).



Plate 2. 'Nostalgic Postcard' marketed by Australia Post, illustrating the attractions of Mildura. Purchased Melbourne, 1996.



Plate 3.

Left to right, Gill Clark, Andrew Jones and Tobias Bock (a woofer from East Germany) outside Andrew's block house. January 1997.

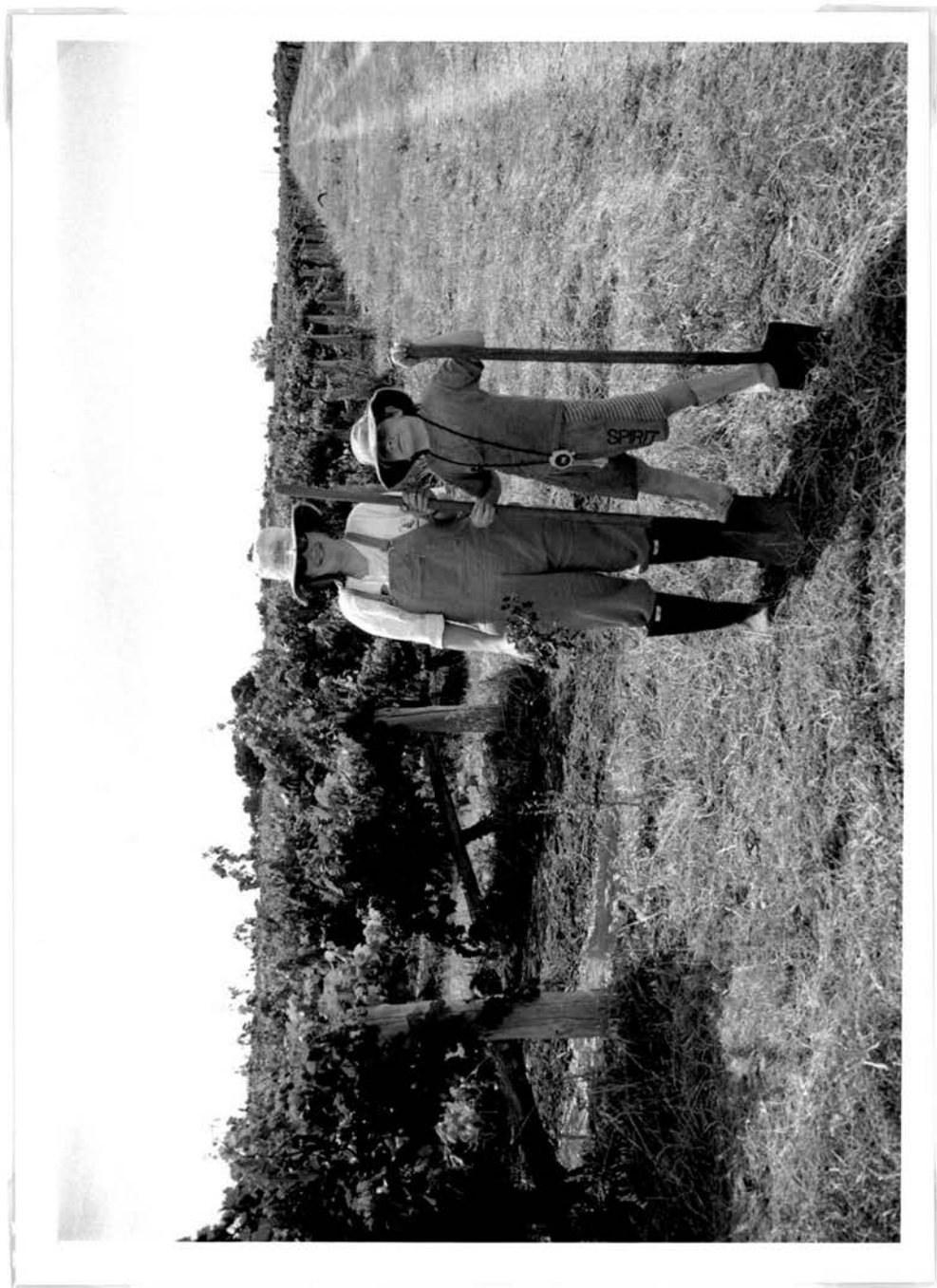


Plate 4.

Gill Clark and Jesse Jones on a Saturday morning helping Andrew Jones with the flood irrigation on Andrew Jones's block.
January 1997.

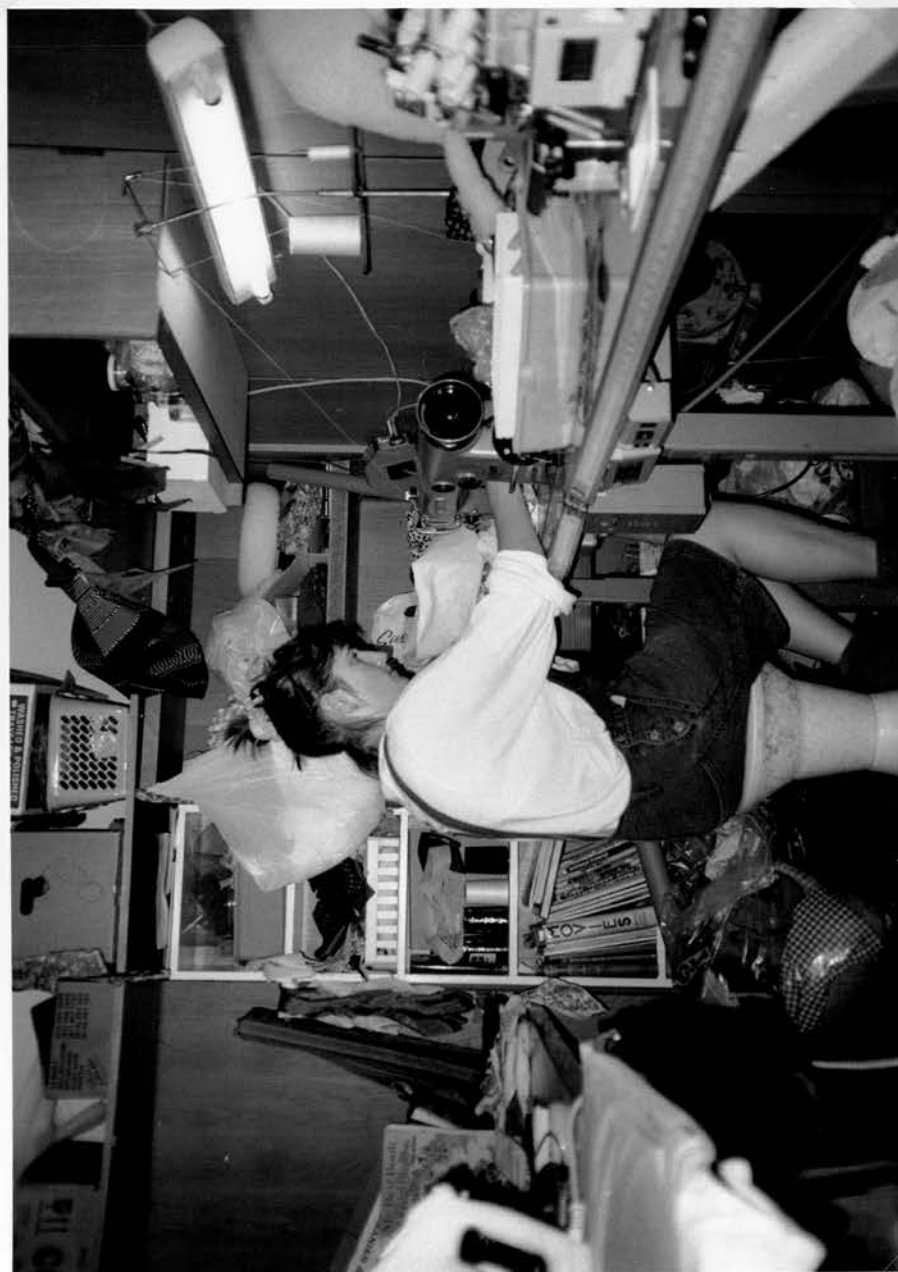


Plate 5. Gill Clark sewing hat linings in Krystyna Schweizer's workshop during the heatwave of 1997. February 1997.

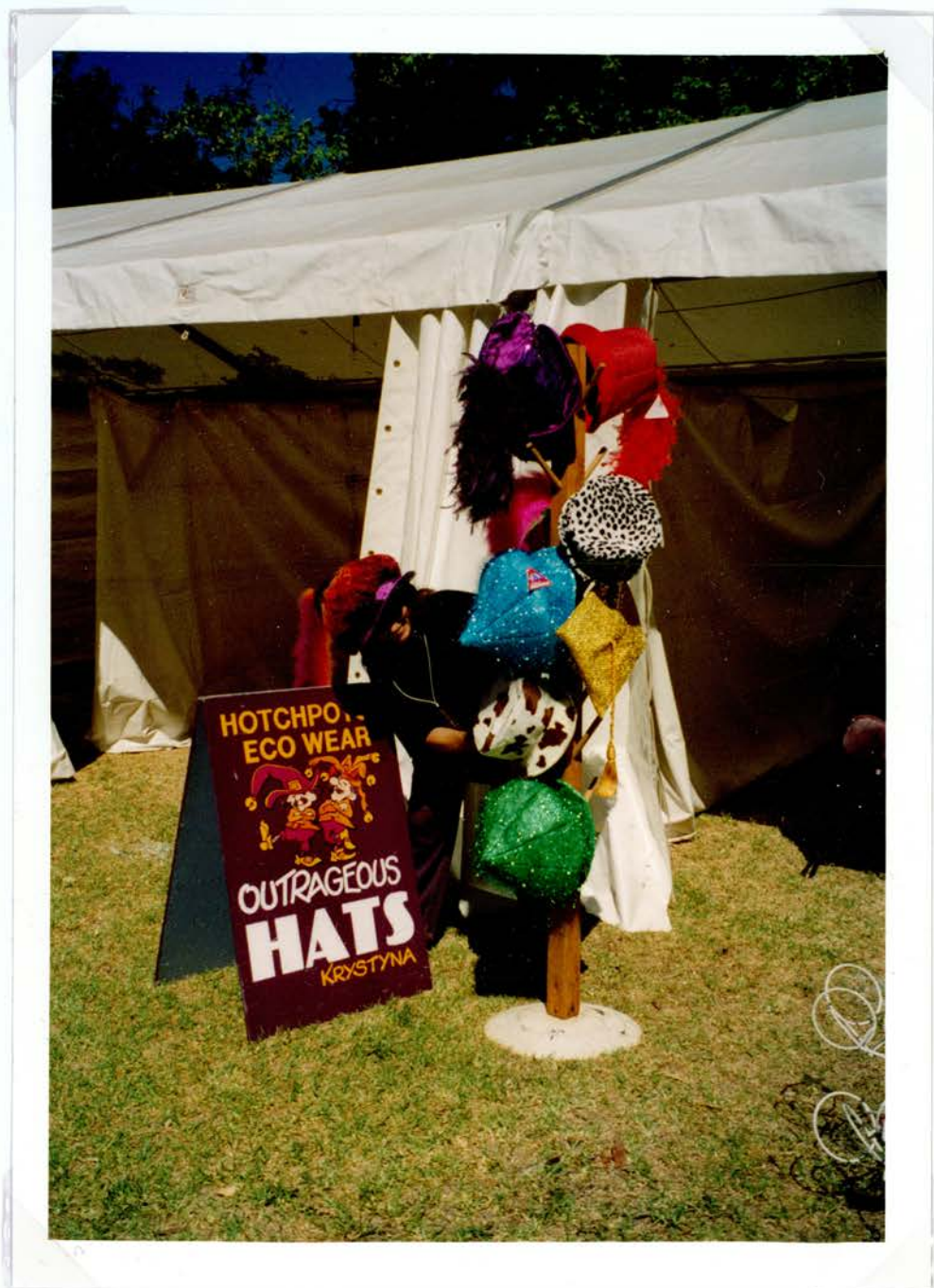


Plate 6. Krystyna Schweizer setting up her stall at the Womadelaide World Music Festival. February 1997



Plate 7. Krystyna Schweizer and Jesse Jones with Stretch the cat outside Krystyna Schweizer's cabin. April 1997.



Plate 8. Gill Clark, Jesse Jones and Krystyna Schweizer sitting outside a Mildura coffee shop. Jesse Jones is wearing a head torch, a birthday present from Gill Clark. August 1997



Plate 9. Members of the Young Women's Group and a male youth worker, outside the Mildura Youth Club. August 1997.



Plate 10. Carinya Branch of the Victoria Country Women's Association, outside the Mildura Baptist Hall. August 1997

CHAPTER THREE

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

This is the significance of storytelling: it is a major way people develop the shared understandings that make society possible. Society exists in the actions and interactions of people. To act, people must first interpret the situations they act in, using common definitions of the situation and understandings of how to act, or developing new ones in interaction. Storytelling is one kind of interaction through which people develop shared understandings (McCall 1989: 46).

My fieldwork was almost a seamless experience of exchanging stories with women in rural Australia, stories which I describe for the purpose of this thesis as personal narratives in general and 'Mildura Stories' in particular. Gullestad observes that her ethnography of young married women in urban Norway 'became a detailed ethnography of the moral reasoning of the kitchen-table conversations of female friends' and that 'the kitchen-table conversation between female friends is a continuous intellectual debate' (Gullestad 1992: 63, 110). Following Gullestad I would suggest that much of the talking I took part in enabled an exchange of information, goods and services to take place, and that talking and recounting personal narratives in Mildura was both 'intellectual work and creation of culture' (Gullestad 1984: 174).

In addition to kitchen table conversations, stories and personal narratives were told to me by the immaculately groomed ladies of the CWA when gathered formally around afternoon tea tables, and by the young girls in the youth club slouched on sofas. I joined in conspiratorial huddles in bars in Mildura to gossip with the pickers, and later with friends, and all of this contributed to an understanding of the way in which stories were exchanged in Mildura, and specifically the means by which different types of information about women was exchanged in Mildura.

The ways in which these stories and words were used strategically in Mildura was of interest to me, and the emerging pattern of men's influential and efficacious oratory and women's muted testimony in Mildura is discussed below.

Narrative is a critical instrument of human agency. It is the principal means by which agents integrate the temporal flow of their activities both as regards substantiating their identities and establishing meaningful relationships with their circumstances. Carrithers argues that narrative understanding enables individuals to interact with complexity, and that narrative patterns are made of people with intentions, attitudes and notions set in a flow of action. He suggests that narrative understanding enables individuals to 'orient themselves and act in an accountable manner, sensibly, effectively, and appropriately, creating and re-creating complex skeins of social life' (Carrithers 1992: 84, 165).

As well as providing a means to facilitate effective social interaction, Carr has argued that narrative is our primary way of organising and reorganising our experience of time and, following Ricoeur, that 'the narrative (récit) of both history and fiction is ultimately a configuration of the human experience of time' (Carr 1986: 4-5; see also Corradi 1991: 116). It follows therefore that the experience of time both bodily and intellectually is articulated by narratives which thereby give coherence to existence and integrate thought and action (Erben 1993: 17). Carr also argues that personal narratives have a particular role to play in enabling people to make sense of themselves, and to project that understanding to others. Further, he suggests that narratives introduce harmony and order into the heterogeneity of actions, intentions, goals, and circumstances of individual lives (Carr 1986: 184).

This interpretative function of personal narratives is of particular significance to this thesis, and Reissman's observation that 'informant's stories do not mirror a world "out there." They are constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and interpretive' (Reissman 1993: 4-5), resonates with my analysis of the strategic use of

²⁶ I am following Angrosino's definition of biography, autobiography, life history and person narratives—'*Biography* will refer to the narrative account of one person's life as written or otherwise recorded by another, reconstructed mainly, though not exclusively, from records and archives. *Autobiography* will pertain to the narrative account of a person's life that he or she has personally written or otherwise recorded. *Life history* will refer to the account of one person's life "as told to" another, the researcher. The term *life story* will be used to distinguish narratives (which may belong to the biographical, autobiographical, or life history categories) that purport to record the entire span of a life from those that tend to highlight a few key events or focus on a few significant relationships or dwell on perceived "turning points". These last three types of accounts, which can belong to any of the three broader categories, will be termed *personal narratives*' (Angrosino 1989a: 3 original emphasis).

personal narratives in Mildura. Similarly, McCall asserts that 'telling stories is a way of sharing information. But a story is also an interpretation, a way of *explaining the meaning of what happened* to readers, listeners, or collaborating storytellers' (McCall 1989:40 emphasis added). For example, in Mildura, the women I met often used personal narratives to make sense of the ambiguities between their awareness that different life opportunities were available for women away from Mildura, and their understanding that it was not possible to create the circumstances for change in Mildura.

The analysis of personal narratives in the thesis has been guided by an understanding that autobiographies are not transparent historical or sociological data, but are essentially amenable to reinterpretation, reconstruction and revision, and to remembering and forgetting, in response to current and anticipated situations and circumstances (Gullestad 1996b: 05; and Byron 1992: 175-176). Bourdieu has made the same point about the 'biographical illusion' whereby biographer and subject collude in delivering a story with a purpose and a plot, in the knowledge that in reality a life is always a discontinuous story (Bourdieu 1980).

In focusing on the relationship between the social life, social action, and the personal narratives used to describe social interactions, I depart, to some extent, from the dominant trend in approaches to life history research in anthropology. It could be argued that discussion of life history research in anthropology has been dominated by work and reviews such as those published by Langness (1965 and 1981), Bertaux (1981), Crapanzano (1977 and 1984), Bertaux and Kohli (1984), Gullestad (1996a) and Hertzfeld (1997), the oral history work by Thompson (1985, 1988, and 1992), and practical guidance, for example Willson (1986).

Whilst recognising the significance of this tradition, I would, however, concur with Jensen who observes that 'women's oral history must go further than the short biographical narrative which gives us picturesque images, but little analysis' (1983: 87). My ethnography is therefore contextualised within feminist debates inaugurated by initiatives such as the Feminist History Research Project (described in Gluck 1977); the work of the Personal Narratives Group (1989); and further debate on the feminist use of oral history, for example, Gluck and Patai (1991), Abu-Lughod (1993), Hoppe (1993), Sangster (1994) and Gorkin et al. (2000). In discussing her own gendered fieldwork, Dossa contextualises her work within a similar feminist framework, and writes:

Personal narratives of women have been explored within the framework of feminist theory. Major themes covered in this context are those of power and

the ways in which women both perpetuate as well as undermine hegemonic structures by means of narratives of acceptance as well as rejection. Brodzki's and Schenck etc. (1988), Benstock ed. (1988) *Personal Narratives Group* (1989) and Abu-Lughod (1986: 41-45) are *especially insightful in relation to how the life story approach has led to recovery of women's lives in the context of the reconstruction of history and the dynamics of change* (Dossa 1994: 351 emphasis added).

Inevitably during fieldwork I also reflected on what aspects of women's lives and episodes of intermittent resistance respondents chose to discuss with me in the form of personal narratives. Thus whilst not searching for complete stories, I was, however (following Burgos 1989), interested in the 'organic whole' of personal narratives created within the context of my fieldwork (and interviews) and the broader preconditions for the genre of the Mildura Stories. By reference to the 'organic whole' Burgos is drawing attention to the deictic quality of narratives and their imbeddedness in the wider social situation.

By examining the context and preconditions for women's narratives, I sought to reflect on how the women I met wished to represent different moments in their lives. Following the Personal Narratives Group, I was interested in:

Truths, a decidedly plural concept meant to encompass the multiplicity of ways in which a woman's life story reveals and reflects important features of her conscious experience and social landscape (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 14).

In seeking alternative truths and women's testimony in Mildura, I came to understand that women's stories were often countermeasures launched against the patriarchal mores of the town, and this heightened my interest in *why* women told their particular stories. Reissman has observed that "'trustworthiness" not "truth" is a key semantic difference: The latter assumes an objective reality, whereas the former moves the process into the social world' (Reissman 1993: 65). My experiences with Krystyna and other respondents proved that rather than seeking the definitive life story of respondents, understanding how and why narratives were deployed by men and women was a more worthwhile research endeavour. In particular, I sought to understand how 'the narrative mediates between the past, present and future, i.e. between past experiences and the meaning they have now acquired for the narrator also in relation to a future project' (Corradi 1991: 107).

One of my elderly respondents spoke to me one day (as we were walking back from inspecting the extent of the thistle problem at her property gate), about the power of the spoken word. She said that it was particularly important to consider the words one speaks, as they go out into the ether and can do damage. She said she had heard of radio broadcasts being picked up on transistors years later, and had a sense of the potential for good and evil that words carried once they were spoken. She had articulated Finnegan's assertion that words 'have not merely a descriptive or expressive force, but, when publicly used in the appropriate context, are in fact a kind of action' (Finnegan 1969: 542).

In developing the analysis of personal narratives I consider speech as social action which affords a remarkable resource for individual strategising and manoeuvre (Brenneis and Myers 1991: ix). Indeed, 'the focus on language as a form of social action derives from an ethnographic encounter with the uses of speech and a sense of the relationship between language and other features of social life' (Myers and Brenneis 1991: 2).

As we will see, particularly in Chapters Six and Seven, 'stories are told not only to inform, to amuse or to illustrate, but also to support an argument or a moral point' (Inheteen 1990: 110-111) or as opportunities to persuade the listener 'how to think about the matter' (Weiner 1991: 179). Significantly, stories are also told as an instructive way of explaining the *meaning of what happened* (McCall 1989). One of the key issues in my fieldwork was the tension between the power of men's oratory and the ineffectiveness of women's testimony in Mildura to *explain what happened*. As Gullestad comments:

Life stories make possible the study of how diverse cultural resources and conventions are employed in the reconstruction of life experiences. A life story is shaped by the material facts of social existence, by deeply embedded notions and expectations about what constitutes a culturally normal life, and

²⁷ Throughout the thesis I refer to women's personal narratives and the Mildura Stories as women's *testimony*. I use the term testimony as understood by Okely: (see below); Skultans who describes testimony as an opportunity for truth-telling and setting the record straight (1998); and as defined in the literature of psychology and psychiatry where testimony is described as a therapeutic tool which can be used to transform traumatic memory. For example, Herman (1994) describes the therapeutic use of testimony and the way in which a 'trauma story' can be transformed to testimony, converting shame and humiliation to dignity and virtue. She reminds us that 'remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims' (1994: 1). She echoes Felman and Laub who suggest that survivors of traumatic events not only need to survive so that they provide their testimony, but also need to address the task of testimony in order to survive (1992: 78).

by conscious and unconscious rules about what constitutes a good story (Gullestad 1996b: 07).

It was my experience that women's stories of resistance in Mildura were discredited as stories of lives which were not culturally normal, and lacked coherence (see Chapter Seven). Likewise it was apparent that, as with Shuman's High School 'fight stories,' men's stories in Mildura

That purport to report actual experiences represent a negotiable reality. Reports of past events may appear to convey information, but at the same time, they also demonstrate relationships between tellers, hearers, characters and others (Shuman 1986: 21).

Men in Mildura generally appeared to exercise the sole 'right to talk about what happened' and in extreme circumstances women were not even in a position to share testimony to discuss an alternative version of what happened (Shuman 1986: 01 and see Chapter Seven).

In this context, 'figurative speech, and veiled speech²⁸ in particular ... [which] carry important functions of social control' was of significance during fieldwork (Strathern 1975: 193). As is discussed in the following chapters, Strathern's comments on veiled speech are particularly pertinent to many of the domestic altercations I witnessed in Mildura. He comments

Veiled speech, so long as the participants can continue to use it, preserves the social relationships between them, while at the same time allowing for information about their dissatisfactions to pass over to their hearers. In other words, it is part of the total set of controls over, and cues about, *the aggressive intentions of the parties at a meeting* (Strathern 1975: 193 emphasis added).

As a result throughout fieldwork, and in the following ethnography, the interpretation of speech and illocutionary acts was, and is, necessarily pervasive in order to comprehend the elusive significance of interactions (Okely 1994b: 25; Finnegan 1969: 548-9).

In introducing a consideration of male oratory, it is pertinent to reflect on Comaroff's observations on Tshidi male oratory, and offer an example of the use of a comparable evaluative code in Mildura. Comaroff writes:

²⁸ 'Speech which contains some degree of potential or actual concealment of meaning, depending on its contexts of use' (Strathern 1975: 185).

In my own experience, the most common manner in which Tshidi speakers signify that they are about to use the evaluative code is through the utterance of a stock phrase such as: "I am a man who speaks his mind" or "I want to say what is in my heart" (Comaroff 1975: 153-154).

Andrew (Krystyna's husband) often made oratorical statements about what constituted appropriate relationships between women and men, and there was a moment in fieldwork when I realised that Andrew was in fact uttering evaluative codes. One evening, towards the end of the time I spent on the block, I queried whether it was appropriate for Andrew to expect me to look after Jesse during Saturday afternoons which was supposed to be time off for wwoofers. We had been discussing whether or not I owed him five cents (see Chapter Six) and I raised the issue of childcare in the context of a discussion about what 'favours' wwoof hosts could reasonably expect from their wwoofers, and vice versa. Andrew did not like being challenged and announced what I later recognised as his 'stock phrase,' 'I'm a man of few words, but my word is gospel' when he told me and another wwoofer present that he was always available to look after Jesse (which was patently not the case) and that I had given him 'the wrong message' about looking after Jesse by organising creative play with the child. The other wwoofer and I were startled by Andrew's tone, and the other wwoofer later suggested to me that it might be a good idea to leave the block as Andrew might get 'the wrong message' about other things. Recognising a potential fieldwork risk (see Biddle 1993) I packed up immediately and left Andrew's block to move to Krystyna's cabin for harvest. The other wwoofer and I recognised that Andrew's utterances were dangerous words, and had been signalled as dangerous, heavy, 'rare utterances' (Weiner 1991: 162). Only veiled speech, as described above, enabled me to decline Andrew's invitation to return to live on the block when the harvest was over and to maintain a cordial relationship with Andrew for the rest of my time in Mildura.

I discuss men's oratory as 'quotidian oratory' because their oratory was what could be defined as manipulative²⁹ oratory expressed in an everyday context (Firth 1975). As discussed in Chapter Seven, influence was lent to a male orator such as Andrew by his claims to an Anglo-Celtic ancestry, and his compliance with Australian rural cultural codes (Schaffer 1988: 8). As Seymour-Smith notes, to be an orator 'one must also be the

²⁹ Oratory can be classified in various ways, depending for instance on how far form, content or objective is taken as primary criterion. I find a convenient division is into: *informative*, conveying new matter; *homiletic*, reinforcement of what is already known, often in moral terms; *expressive*, putting feeling into spoken form (tension-release); *persuasive*, with over presentation of argument to form or change opinion or induce action; and *manipulative*, where over presentation has covert ends. These are emphases, not exclusive criteria, and several may be found in any single piece of oratory (Firth 1975: 42).

right kind of person from which such behaviour is acceptable' (Seymour-Smith 1996: 213) a person who will follow precedent, and repeat well-accepted ideas using well-known examples. Andrew excelled at this, to Krystyna's disadvantage, particularly in the deployment of words and narratives, where an 'actor may use an utterance or an event to constitute a wider system of meaning' (Myers and Brenneis 1991: 19-20). Likewise, it could be argued that Andrew and others used Mildura gossip in the same way that Melanesian magic spells were deployed. I argue in the following chapters that it was possible to see personal narratives and accounts, 'like weighted arrows ... projected towards another person's personal space' (Weiner 1991: 165).

Throughout the thesis I contrast these efficacious speech acts and manipulative oratory with women's truth-telling or testimony. For women, the task of testimony was particularly difficult in Mildura because as Campbell observes, 'recovery depends on safety, space for remembrance and mourning, and testimony: the survivor piecing together her own story, her own version of events. This is particularly problematic for women since it requires them to repudiate the social demand for submission' (1998: 223). As this ethnography illustrates, offering resistance to the patriarchy in Mildura, or resisting the will of a husband or his family, put women at risk of censure and social sanctions. I therefore argue in this thesis that women's testimony in Mildura was muted because they were only prepared to risk addressing the task of testimony in the private sphere. In public, for the most part, women survivors of family tumult obeyed orders to maintain the family rule of silence (*ibid.*). Herman writes that in doing so, women carry the weight of a burden that does not belong to them. She argues that in order to recover from trauma, women must 'renounce the burden of shame, guilt, and responsibility, and place this burden on the perpetrator where it properly belongs' (1994: 200). As we will see, in Mildura this was a principle advocated by respondents in private, but a maxim only the domestic violence unit staff could articulate in public.

Krystyna's Story

Absent from the archives but scattered in our field notes, there are fragments of resistance. It is not that the atypical individuals should be seen as unitary isolates. Only at certain moments may they show difference and defiance. These moments are fragile and often submerged from view. We should capture them where we can (Okely 1996: 229).

In reference to the two people she discusses in her research in rural England and rural France—Mr Busby and Madame Grégoire—Okely goes on to comment 'their resistance came

only at specific times in their life cycles and coinciding with wider historical events or changes ... Yet their fragmented resistance informs us of the power of structures of subordination' (Okely 1996: 231). It is precisely because Krystyna's resistance³⁰ informs us of the patriarchal power and structures of subordination in Mildura that I have foregrounded her personal narratives in the ethnography—it is possible to see how, as a marginal voice, she both challenged the male patriarchal structure and showed its form (Okely 1996: 214). Likewise:

The personal narrative, whether it reveals an acceptance or a challenge to the given rules, also documents on the individual level the very process of reproduction or undermining of those rules ... Both narratives of acceptance and narratives of rebellion are responses to the system in which they originate and thus reveal its dynamics (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 08).

In addition, my particular interest in Krystyna's story (and the Mildura Stories) is about a 'concern with unlikely forms of resistance, subversions rather than large-scale collective insurrections' and with the use of 'resistance as a *diagnostic* of power' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42). Furthermore, within the context of the ambiguities inherent in the relationships between men and women in Mildura, I would also concur with Ortner who observes:

I think resistance, even at its most ambiguous, is a reasonably useful category, if only because it highlights the presence and play of power in most forms of relationship and activity (Ortner 1995: 175).

Reflecting on how narratives are gathered in the field, the Personal Narratives Group recognise that 'the interpreter is an active participant involved in distinctive ways with the shaping of a personal narrative' (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 201). The elements of Krystyna's personal narratives in this thesis are very much 'documents of interaction' (Angrosino 1989a: 1), which were the result of the 'drama' of interaction, the process that generates the narrative (Angrosino 1989: 4) in a very literal sense. While Gullestad (1984: 221) comments in relation to episodes in her respondents' lives, that by focusing on dramatic

³⁰ I use the term 'resistance' advisedly and acknowledge that it is a contested term. Resistance, as discussed below, is the most appropriate descriptor for the events and narratives in my ethnography. However, I would emphasise that this thesis does not engage with academic critiques or debates centred around resistance, but rather it is an ethnography of fragmentary and isolated acts of resistance. The resistance described in personal narratives, and women's will to resist, ebbed and flowed, and my respondents were sometimes even collaborating in sustaining the oppressive circumstances of married life in Mildura. To paraphrase Okely (1996: 212), given the facts of subordination of women in Mildura, it is the phenomenon of intermittent resistance that the ethnography seeks to illuminate—'given contexts where persons or groups are ultimately subordinate, we need to know more about their necessary complicity in some cases and potential or actual resistance in others' (Okely *ibid.*: 212).

incidents she ran the risk of their lives seem more dramatic than they were, I am more inclined to ask the reader to keep in mind that Krystyna's life during fieldwork was more dramatic than the thesis suggests it was. It would also perhaps be useful to observe that Krystyna's personal narratives were the outcome of a particular interview context, a dialogue between a teller and listener in an asymmetrical relation at a particular historical moment' (cf. Reissman 1993: 31). As Burgos observes:

It is important to identify the particular kind of tension on which the need to tell one's life story is based; for we can be sure that telling one's life story is not a 'natural' thing. A life story can be understood as a reaction to a situation in which the subject's self identity (which is something s/he must have to be in order to be able to present a narrator's point of view) seems to be threatened. By telling one's life story, one exorcises an uncomfortable life situation, a 'malaise.' A life story thus seems to come about as the result of an existential difficulty (Burgos 1989: 36-37).

In considering how Krystyna chose to tell me her story, it is useful to reflect on Angrosino's assertion that 'In order for there to be a "life history" at all, there must be some sort of compromise or accommodation between the interviewer and the storyteller about what is to be revealed and the form that revelation will take' (Angrosino 1989b: 318). During my time in Mildura I largely left it up to Krystyna to decide what she wanted to tell me about her life. However, I should add that respecting Krystyna's choice and form of representation of her personal narratives was not challenging in the field because Krystyna knew she had a 'good' life story and she was frequently courted by the press at the folk festivals where she sold her hats (as for example by Wallace—see Preface).³¹ Krystyna had also been flattered to be told by a friend's son who worked in the film industry that she should make a film of her life charting her journey from her childhood on an African Mission, through Europe, and across Australia. Therefore knowing she had interesting stories to tell, Krystyna told me narratives of her life, talking in her cabin while sewing hats; on car journeys; out in social situations; commenting on what was happening during the time I spent with her, and comparing it with events of the past; and once in a tape recorded interview. Then, when faced with the challenge of speaking 'concentrated testimony' (Okely 1996: 223)—despite our having previously discussed all of the events she was narrating in great depth—Krystyna said how 'difficult' it was to talk about her life.

³¹ Burgos suggests that 'the *récit de vie* is not just any story of one's life, but in order to be 'good' it must fulfil the criteria of substance and coherence which are necessary to establish the credibility of the person in his/her autobiography' (Roos 1989: 27). Krystyna was aware that she had a 'good' and fascinating story in this sense, but it was a story that was not recognised as either good or coherent in Mildura (see Chapter Seven).

On reflection, it was perhaps an unorthodox way to gather personal narratives from Krystyna, but I would concur with Angrosino who observes that 'chronological order is an artefact of Western culture, but even in our own literature, it isn't always the most effective way to tell a story' (Angrosino 1989b: 322). Certainly the way in which Krystyna told me her stories was in a very diverse range of circumstances, and in response to both unusual and quotidian events. Construction of a life story 'is the mode by which the individual represents those aspects of his past which are relevant to the present situation' (Kohli 1981: 65)—and the situation, and Krystyna's predicament during fieldwork, changed so often that many of Krystyna's personal narratives were told to me in response to specific events or developments, notably in relation to Jesse's well-being.

For example, the action of compiling Jesse's case history for Krystyna for submission to the child psychiatrist in Melbourne provided an unusual circumstance for the revelation of personal narratives and, at the time we were compiling Jesse's case history, it seemed to Krystyna to be a vicarious way of presenting her own life story for judgement. Despite the personal challenge of representing the disturbing aspects of Jesse's early life, Krystyna managed to tell me what to draft for the case history report. Even at the time, however, we were conscious of the rather surreal situation of us sitting late at night at the kitchen table, with the air conditioning unit providing a background drone to me marshalling facts, proof-reading, and checking harrowing details of Jesse's short life, in the same way in which one would check the particular date when one moved house, or changed job, when filling in an application form for a mortgage or insurance.

We often talked about life history research and, several times during fieldwork, Krystyna told me that I should write down everything that had happened to her so that she would always be able to remember it all, to be able to tell her daughters, and to be able to remind herself of what happened. When thinking this way, Krystyna often spoke of her radicalism in the 1970s and 1980s and, as with Okely's Mr Busby, at these times the stories Krystyna 'chose for special focus were about these moments of defiance' (Okely 1996: 224). However, Krystyna's story was her story as she chose to tell and reveal it to me. Some events Krystyna never told me about and I did not ask about—as perhaps with all life stories, some aspects do not bear repetition and are consigned to be forgotten. She

also asked me 'not to be too hard on Andrew'³² when we corresponded about my ethnography after I returned to Edinburgh.

All this resulted in a complex series of personal narratives, some suitable for inclusion in a thesis and some not. I would suggest that this means that the thesis is inevitably an incomplete, partial, and indeed censored representation of specific events, which recognises that all narrated stories are only the story from a particular individual's point of view (Carrithers 1992: 91)

However, I would argue that representing a story as partial and as censored should not be confused with 'ethnographic refusal' (Ortner 1995), or a tendency to romanticise resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990). Ortner observes that 'it is the absence of analysis of these forms of internal conflict in many resistance studies that gives them an air of romanticism, of which they are often accused' (Ortner 1995: 177).

She also writes that 'The impulse to sanitize the internal politics of the dominated must be understood as fundamentally romantic' (Ortner 1995: 179). In choosing to foreground Krystyna's version of events, her narratives of *what happened*, I would assert that this respects a feminist interpretation and analysis of events, respondent confidentiality, and an understanding of Krystyna's (and other women respondent's) position as one of oppression and subjugation. In later chapters (particularly Chapter Seven) it also represents my judgement on the respective validity and coherence of Krystyna's and Andrew's narratives. In this thesis the reader is provided with what Ortner describes as 'ethnographic thickness' by presenting, to some extent, Andrew's side of the story, and certainly I would not suggest that this thesis sought to sanitise the internal politics of the dominated. Indeed, it would be possible to include numerous vignettes illustrating 'ethnographic refusal' (Ortner *ibid.*). However, I would suggest that the imperative here would not be to seek a romantic sanitised version of events, or to deny conflict between

³² Renzetti and Lee comment on such issues where the practicable solution on receipt of such requests is to resort to self-censorship. They write: 'It is understandable that social scientists resort to self-censorship where publication might potentially jeopardize a carefully cultivated research relationship or bring down retribution on themselves or on those they study. This gives rise to an unwelcome paradox, however. The greater the sensitivity of a particular topic, the greater the likelihood that self-censorship will protect those in the research setting (Barnes, 1984; Jahoda, 1981). Unfortunately, situations of this kind are also more likely to be those where there exists a clear and urgent social interest in accurate reporting (Fichter and Kolb, 1953)' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 230).

women in Mildura;³³ but rather to focus on how men's narratives, and quotidian oratory was used 'to put across a moral view of the world in the interests of power and manipulation' (Carr 1986:16).

I would also acknowledge that researching everyday forms of resistance does present analytical dilemmas (Abu-Lughod 1990), and I do not obscure the fact that women in Mildura were clearly engaged in collaboration in their own oppression, as well as resistance. Abu-Lughod asks:

How might we account for the fact that Bedouin women both resist and support the existing system of power (they support it through practices like veiling, for example), without resorting to analytical concepts like false consciousness, which dismisses their own understanding of their situation, or impression management, which makes of them cynical manipulators (Abu-Lughod 1990: 47).

In Mildura, Krystyna and other women I met described this type of action as 'survival,' and occasionally (in this context) described themselves as 'survivors' and admitted collaborating in their own oppression. Ortner comments on the rationale behind these types of survival strategy by writing that:

In a relationship of power, the dominant often has something to offer, and sometimes a great deal (though always of course at the price of continuing in power). The subordinate thus has many grounds for ambivalence about resisting the relationship (Ortner 1995: 175).

In Mildura, as is explored in the following chapters, what was on offer included housing, income, and respectability; and the cost of resistance (and hence the pragmatic justification for collaboration) is illustrated in Chapter Seven. In Krystyna's case, the ambivalence discussed by Ortner was exemplified by her living arrangements and associated movement on and off Andrew's block over the years, and her self-representation as a blocky's wife in newspaper articles. For example, in 1999 Krystyna and Andrew appeared in *Acres Australia*, an organic farming newspaper, in which Krystyna posed for

³³ For example, one day in Mildura an acquaintance of Andrew and Krystyna stopped me in the street and asked me to join her for a cappuccino. Sitting at a pavement table outside one of Mildura's cafes she *confided* in me that Andrew adored Jesse and had been an ideal father, told me Krystyna was a poor disciplinarian and only had herself to blame over how her daughters had 'turned out,' and said that she was astonished that Krystyna had allowed me to admonish Jesse for poor table manners and to encourage him to eat properly at the kitchen table. She concluded that Krystyna and Andrew would stay married, because underneath all the arguments, he was a devoted father and they were in love.

photographs with Andrew, and was described as 'Andrew's wife' in a feature on organic viticulture.

Unlike narrative fiction, fieldwork does not, and indeed should not, yield satisfying happy endings. The last somewhat ambivalent ending which encapsulated the resistance and collaboration described by Ortner (1995) that I am able to include in the thesis, arrived in the post in Edinburgh in January 2001. Krystyna had posted me a beautiful coffee table book *Australians the people and their stories* which included Andrew and herself as one of the featured couples. The book showed an idyllic representation of life on the block with lustrous colour photographs of Andrew on the land and Krystyna surrounded by hats in her workshop. However, inside the front cover of the book was a postcard from Krystyna saying she had moved off the block and was living again in a unit (rented house) in Mildura—at once collaborating and resisting.

Finally in this consideration of Krystyna's story, in choosing to foreground Krystyna's story, it has been suggested that I should justify whether Krystyna was representative of rural women in Mildura, or other areas of rural Australia. Rather than justifying this decision, I would simply agree with Okely's view that we can learn from the experience of the individual, in this case Krystyna's history of resistance in a small town in rural Australia. Referring to the demands Shostak (1981) faced in this regard (see also Shostak 1989) Okely comments:

Shostak (1981) is repeatedly obliged to justify her study of Nisa in terms of her typicality as a !Kung woman, worrying that Nisa's story might be 'idiosyncratic.' Instead it would have been illuminating to learn why and to what extent Nisa resisted homogenisation. This does not mean that individual manipulation could on its own transform wider structures (Okely 1996: 213).

In this way, Krystyna's story, together with the Mildura Stories, can inform us about how narratives can be used to create coherence and build a self-image and as Burgos states:

I believe that life stories are the best material—and perhaps the only one—on which to base research into the way in which the individual builds his/her social self-image, as the living product of the interaction of several kinds of tension (Burgos 1989: 37).

Mildura Stories

Turning now to the broader range of respondents whom I met and interviewed in Mildura, I describe the personal narratives I collected from them, as Mildura Stories, since all of the women I interviewed told stories of life in Mildura, and almost all of the women and men had spent most of their lives in Mildura.

Lives were marked out through personal narratives focusing on life cycle events, especially through reference to marriage, women's engagement with community affairs, or milestones associated with family births and deaths, floods and droughts, or the local impact of significant national events such as the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. When we discussed social change the women commented on events in their lives which were affected by national changes such as Gough Whitlam's family law reforms in 1974, and apparently arbitrary local Mildura milestones, such as the arrival of a pizza parlour in Mildura, followed by Indian, Thai and Turkish restaurants.

One of my original research ideas for my PhD was a consideration of representations of the rural family with a particular interest in how post-feminism, or the interests of the New Right—see, for example, Klatch (1987) and Brown (1984)—were being articulated by women in a rural context. However, what proved to be salient in Mildura was men explicitly articulating a New Right ideology and, in their Mildura Stories, women articulating an implicitly feminist agenda with the caveat that significant change for women within their families was not, nor expected, to happen in Mildura in the foreseeable future. As a result I was left with Mildura Stories and ethnographic experiences which were characterised by ambiguities.

However, as Shostak noted I found that personal narratives were an 'elegant tool' through which people living ordinary and not-so-ordinary lives weave from their memories and experiences the meaning life has for them (Shostak 1989: 239). Gullestad also suggests that her ethnography of young married women's lives in urban Norway is about the 'ordinary lives of ordinary people' (Gullestad 1984: 13), and likewise, Inhetveen stresses her perception of her rural German respondent's understanding of the ordinariness of their lives. She writes, 'most of them are convinced that there is nothing special about their individual life which would distinguish them from other women in the village' (Inhetveen 1990: 107). However, in Mildura, although respondents sometimes initially questioned what they could have to say about their ordinary lives that would be of interest to me, at the same time there was a strong sense that their lives as ordinary

women were of value and significance. Like the testimony of Okely's Madame Grégoire (1996: 228) I found that the Mildura women's articulate and coherent views emerged from practice and critical resistance (ibid.: 228), and would suggest that many of the narratives were 'retrospective narratives of resistance' (Abu-Lughod 1990:44). In some cases recounting personal narratives provided an opportunity for 'an act of recovery which exhumes a past of struggle against oppression' (Morris 1990: 83; see also Abu-Lughod 1990: 44).

The Presentation and Use of Life Story Material and Ethnography

In presenting and using material from the corpus of Mildura Stories I have sought to follow Gullestad who, in her ethnography sought to answer 'questions about how things are, not what they ought to be, and focus on the problems they [the women] actually feel and express' and thereby 'to make visible and tangible not only their problems, but also their resources, their problem-solving abilities, and the dignity of their lives' (ibid. 1984: 11-12).

In considering how anthropologists shape texts to represent the lives of our respondents, Ortner observes that:

The anthropologist and the historian are charged with representing the lives of people who are living or once lived, and as we attempt to push these people into the molds of our texts, they push back. The final text is a product of our pushing and their pushing back, and no text, however dominant, lacks the traces of this counterforce (Ortner 1995: 189).

My analysis takes account of this counterforce but I have also followed Burgos who asserts that when dealing with autobiographical material the research has to address 'the fact that these stories have their own logic and are not only data, but texts, narratives, a *genre*' (Roos 1989: 27). Burgos also argues that in narratives, such as the Mildura Stories, the counterforce of the narrator and researcher creates a *mis en forme*. She writes:

Non-directive interviews usually start with an opening question such as: 'Could you tell me the story of your life because ...'. The explicit objectives vary from the most general—'it is interesting from the standpoint of historical research'—to the most precise—'It throws light on the history of the life-style of rural women at the beginning of the century.' The raw material thus obtained is then transcribed. Finally it is given a form (*mise en forme*), which involves organizing the material following a thematic and/or chronological principle, depending on the goals of the research. In both cases, the result is actually the same; for in any one social group, nearly the same

themes appear at the same moments in the lives of all its members—which confirms what Abastado says about the implicit cultural norms and models governing the 'spontaneous' production of such narratives (Burgos 1989: 31).

I would suggest that a dominant genre/*mis en forme* amongst the retrospective narratives of resistance I gathered in Mildura was similar to that described by Roos in relation to work he conducted in Finland. He describes:

The kind of life story where the writer begins by describing a process in which he or she loses all self-esteem and self-confidence and consequently lets life just happen, becomes passive and then, little by little, starts rebuilding this confidence until finally some success has been reached (Roos 1987: 7).

In this way, in the Mildura Stories, everyday events such as the purchase of a new mop and bucket could come to represent moments of 'success.' For example, the premature death of a close friend prompted one respondent to replace her worn out cleaning mop and bucket which eventually precipitated a return to college and a liberating divorce. The conceptual system, the narrative understanding, shared by women in Mildura made these narratives of resistance comprehensible but implicitly acknowledged women's subordination and served as a warning against overt rebellion (see also Chapter Seven).

Personal narratives cannot therefore be treated simply as a source of social information (Burgos 1989: 29). I have therefore presented context set beside content, to contrast the significance of *the life* with *the story* by presenting four ethnographic chapters, each combining ethnographic experience, commentary from rural women, and all referencing specifically the key narrative, that of Krystyna. Chapter Four takes account of men's and women's views on gender issues in Mildura, and Chapters Five, Six, and Seven focus specifically on aspects of block life, marriage, work and domestic violence respectively. I chose to write about these issues, because it seemed to me that these were the issues which the women I met and worked with felt most strongly about, and because they seemed to engage the women's interest in a particular way (Gullestad 1984). The themes chosen also reflected my fieldwork experience, and revealed most about the situation and interests of women within the *habitus* of Mildura, 'the socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures, and the socially structured situation in which the agents interests are defined' (Bourdieu 1977: 76).

However I should also state clearly that these are not the only themes of their discourse and that the personal narratives and fieldwork raised other matters which are not

included in the thesis. The most significant of these were health, notably obstetric care, and the role of the churches and faith in people's lives.

The presentation of personal narratives has taken into account commitments to confidentiality I made in the field. To respect the fieldwork agreements I made, I have drawn on 'the narrative device of splitting up a single informant's identity, presenting quotes and extracts from life histories discretely in order to preserve anonymity and confidentiality' (Sheehan 1993: 82). This approach explicitly does not romanticize the relationship between anthropologist and respondents but provides insights into the lives of the women I met in Mildura and into the issues that preoccupied them at the time of my fieldwork.

Conclusion

My interpretation of Krystyna's Story and of the corpus of Mildura Stories as narratives which contain accounts of fragmentary resistance has been theorised as a pragmatic rather than romantic illustration of resistance in Mildura. This approach inevitably gives prominence to the themes of marriage, work and domestic violence in the ethnographic analysis of these narratives in the following chapters. The next chapter turns to the representation of rural men and rural women in Mildura, and illustrates women's understanding of Mildura as a 'man's town.' This provides the immediate context for the subsequent ethnographic chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

REPRESENTATIONS OF 'RURAL WOMEN' AND 'RURAL MEN' IN MILDURA

Mildura: The Gendered Rural Setting

One day during fieldwork, I interviewed a glamorous grandmother who was baby-sitting three of her grandchildren for the afternoon. The children were all under five and were playing outside on the veranda while we talked inside. As the interview progressed, like many of my respondents, the grandmother said it was 'common sense' that there were fundamental differences between boys and girls, and men and women. Even though she had tried to raise her children and grandchildren 'equally,' she said she saw 'fundamental genetic differences' coming through in her children and grandchildren. This, she felt, was perfectly illustrated that afternoon because outside, one of the grandsons spent the afternoon repeatedly thumping up and down the veranda waving an aeroplane making engine noises before diving headlong into the sand pit from the end of the veranda. Meanwhile her granddaughter came in and out of the kitchen for biscuits and cheese to share with her brothers, to tell us in detail about what she was doing outside, and at the end of the afternoon, to show me her nail varnish. She had painted her toes with mother of pearl nail varnish with a glitter finish and when I said what a fabulous colour I thought it was, she took off her sandals to show me the full effect. As we were talking about different colours of nail varnish and contrasting colours of glitter, after a lifetime of campaigning for the rights of women and children, her grandmother said:

With my granddaughter, her mother often says to her 'it's a tough world kid so get with it and stay there.' It is a tough world for a woman, and I'm not sure it's going to change for a long time.

The grandmother expressed views that I heard from many other women in Mildura, and this chapter reflects on the gendered rural setting of Mildura, and local representation of 'rural women' and 'rural men,' by women themselves. The first half of the chapter which deals with the quotidian focus on rural women's capacity for hard physical labour on the land; their ability to cope with difficult circumstances; the expectation of women's commitment to 'holding the family together'; and the understanding that rural girls are 'less trouble' than 'city girls,' suggests that to some extent the women I met were

'apprenticed' (Okely 1975) in childhood or after marriage to subordination, and a life of limited opportunities.

The second half of the chapter deals with my respondents' representations of rural men,³⁴ and these present some ambiguities in that men were described by women³⁵ in terms of how they are *not like women*, rather than in terms of manly attributes. There was also ambiguity in women's representations of men as being personally (and particularly emotionally) uncomplicated, and yet still having the power to place extreme restrictions and constraints on the behaviour of women in their households. The significance of women's understanding of men as having a 'natural' or 'genetic' *disposition* for violence is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Discussion of gender inequality in rural towns and surrounding communities has been well rehearsed elsewhere (notably Dempsey 1992, and see Chapter One), but I would concur with Gullestad who comments:

It is not in itself a bad thing that folk notions such as the notions of wholeness or everyday life are imported into social science theory. This only reflects that the scholars pay attention to what goes on in the world around them. However, social science scholars should not reproduce folk notions uncritically instead of examining them and applying them in critical and reflective ways (Gullestad 1992: 33).

I would suggest therefore that it is useful to describe the gendered rural setting within which women understood their lives to be taking place to provide a context for the following ethnography.

It could be argued that the women presented to me 'common sense knowledge' (Holy and Stuchlik 1983) or 'more or less coherent structures of different generality which can

³⁴ I interviewed 6 men as 'contextual' respondents, and during fieldwork spent time with Andrew; his mates (particularly Noel and Bryan) and other male neighbours and associates; and my male fieldwork friends. This provided some useful insights into male representations of women in Mildura, but male perspectives did not prove to be the central focus of the thesis. I was courted by men I met as a potential 'blocky's missus' (see Chapter Five), but was also warned by women that I would be viewed as 'legitimate 'game'' (Hastrup 1987), and frequently advised by women, and men, not to risk interviewing 'non-professional' men outwith a formal office context in Mildura.

³⁵ Like Abu-Lughod, I was interested in considering the changing situation of women rather than men because 'first, few studies of resistance have focused on women; second, gender power seems to be one of the more difficult forms of power to analyze; and third, the circumstances of doing fieldwork in a sex-segregated society are such that I have more of the kind of rich and minute detail needed for this sort of analysis from women than I do from men' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42 emphasis added).

usefully be called models, i.e. folk models' (Holy and Stuchlik 1981: 17) relating to the behaviour and lives of rural men, and rural women in Mildura. In later chapters it is apparent that women felt that there was a well defined *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977) in Mildura relating to appropriate gender relations—a matrix of perceptions and actions, 'principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules' (Bourdieu 1977: 72)—and as discussed in Chapter Seven such *habitus* was thrown into relief most clearly when women transgressed the rules.

I should also stress that this chapter does not deny the heterogeneity of views and opinions expressed to me regarding gender difference, but does reflect a series of broad assumptions and understandings that women did appear to share, and discussed with me during fieldwork.

Women's Representation of 'Rural Women' in and around Mildura

Gullestad (1984) comments that it was her experience in Bergen that 'the problem of these women in a complex urban society is that they have no clear and unambiguous notions at hand about what it means to realize oneself as a woman. Ideas and values are contradictory when brought together in concrete situations' (Gullestad 1984: 21). By contrast in Mildura, although many of the women I met were leading complex lives replete with ambiguity and tensions, they shared strong cultural understandings of representations of what it was to be, or become, a rural woman—whether they considered themselves to be rural women or not. In effect, as noted by Gullestad discussing modern autobiography in Norway (Gullestad 1996b) the women I met in Mildura demonstrated a knowledge of representations of rural women, and an ability to 'cultivate' (ibid.: 293) those representations in their own biography. She writes:

The place one comes from encompasses the natural scenery, people and relationships, the physical structures, cultural history, and the local dialect. Often the place is a metaphor for people and relationships. It is almost a moral duty not only to "know where one comes from," *but also, somehow, to cultivate it* (Gullestad 1996b: 293 emphasis added).

When women first met me during fieldwork they generally related the research work I was doing to the ABC Radio Rural Woman of The Year Award, told me about local award winners, and asked me if I had read Sarah Henderson's best-selling autobiography *From Strength to Strength* (Henderson 1992) which told stories of the trials and triumphs of Mrs

Henderson (a former Australian of The Year, and high profile breast cancer campaigner) in rural Queensland.

When comparing themselves to the high-achieving ABC Award finalists or local 'rural superwomen' (Crook 1997), many of the women I met suggested that I would be advised to focus my study on these high-profile local women, and questioned their own authenticity as 'real' rural women. One woman who had grown up on a property and now lived in Mildura, asked me 'are we counted as rural women in the city of Mildura, or is it only women on the farms who are rural women?' and another considered herself unsuitable for interview because, she said, 'I'm not the glamorous sort of living on the land rural woman, I'm just like a city person, only living in a smaller place.'

However, following months of me emphasising my interest in what I considered to be the 'extraordinary lives of ordinary people,' and identifying my respondents as rural women whose views would be important to my work, women (and the men I interviewed) presented a very interesting series of representations of rural women in Mildura.

The first, and predominant, representation was that of rural women's innate or acquired capacity for work (see Chapter Six), and their ability to 'cope' with the difficult circumstances of life in rural Australia. The stock phrase 'you can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl' was often used by women I talked to, to illustrate how rural characteristics had helped them to cope with difficult circumstances when they had lived in the city, or retired off the land and into Mildura.

A rural upbringing, or marriage to a farmer or blocky was widely perceived to engender a rural common sense and practical attitude in women, including the ability to work hard, and to balance work and family life. When reflecting on the diversity of skills contained in the Carinya CWA group, one respondent told me:

Maybe they are as I said 'Practical Ladies.' And we have got a core of ladies who have been brought up in the bush or even around here on blocks and things. Whether that comes out of necessity I don't know. In the bush you can't run out into the street and scream for help if something goes wrong, you've got to deal with it, and maybe that instils that practicality into you. You just get on and do it. It doesn't enter your head that you can't, because if there's only you to do it, you do.

Being capable and practical, and able to cope with adversity, was repeatedly represented to me as something rural women did better than rural men. One woman commented that

after life in the bush, 'you become more practical, and don't fly into a tizzy over mishaps and things that happen. You become capable in that way,' and it could be argued that Lawson's 'Bush Mum' was here being reinvented as a contemporary cultural representation. Schaffer comments, 'although the bush is "no place for a woman," nonetheless, a woman in a man's life is seen to preserve his identity and protect him from disintegration' (Schaffer 1988: 122).

Significantly, after commenting about his perception of the 'slight' role women played in the viticulture and horticulture production in Mildura, one of my male respondents was quick to add, however, that during a bad harvest:

The women really come to fore as the strength of the family, while the man falls apart worrying about the finances and that: Mum stands up as the backbone.

For such men in Mildura, the 'natural' place of the rural woman was as the complementary helpmate of the male head of household or blocky, and—as observed by Schaffer in her work—in Mildura, the 'unnatural' state of the woman coming to the fore, was presented as a temporary episode occurring only when the husband became erratic or unsteady:

This 'unnatural' event can occur because the bushman (whether he be from the gentry or the servant class) has become 'erratic, unsteady.' Only in such a 'primitive' place could such a role reversal take place. His wife preserves his position for him. The position is one of authority and of central importance to the maintenance of the social order, the family and the state (Schaffer 1988: 71).

This representation of women's subordination was borne out by women's assertion that in spite of their personal aspirations for equality, the role of the rural woman, as one respondent put it, 'would be always sort of creating the environment for the man to be the show.' One respondent told me that her mother had always carried out the book keeping and accounting on the farm, and prepared all the business cheques on the farm, but it was her father who signed the cheques with a great flourish. As discussed in Chapter Six, women told me that rural women would be thought to be predominantly interested in crafts, charity work, children and grandchildren; and (if living on a block) whatever her own business interests, it would be critical that she should never embarrass her blocky husband by ever implying that her work was anything other than pin money for the household, or implying that her husband could not support the family.

Despite women's quotidian experience that their work was of critical importance to the success of a family block or business in Mildura, respondents asserted that only rural women's work which *complemented* men's work would be publicly validated in Mildura. The best example of this was provided by one respondent, a former state finalist in the ABC Victorian Rural Woman of the Year competition, who had encouraged farm diversification in her area in the 1980s, and gone on to lead a number of successful community ventures in publishing and tourism. My respondents insisted that I should interview her, and when I did, her well-rehearsed narrative (she had featured numerous times on television, radio and exhibitions) about the community activities she led during the 1980s encapsulated the popular motifs of resourcefulness in the face of adversity; women pursuing appropriate craft-based business strategies which did not encroach on men's work (see also Chapter Six); and commitment and 'service' to the local community. In interview, she summarised her experience as follows:

Everything went really bad in farming in the 1980s, you couldn't borrow, you couldn't get ahead. So I called a community meeting, and talked to friends, and asked them to talk to their friends, and if anyone was interested in doing something to turn up at my place, which we did. We talked about what we could do with cottage industries and no one knew what to do, and so we all thought about it. I'm an outside type of person, and decided we could grow flowers—we had water on tap. We had to think about something non-exotic, for example banksias and proteas, and I had a girlfriend in a flower business, and so had asked her about foliage because I can grow trees. She said we have problems with foliage—because in Mildura they were also just being sent what was left over. So I said 'if I can grow foliage will you buy it?' She said 'Yep.' So proteas, banksia, foliage, chrysanthemums were all goers. One boy took on banksias, another took on geraldin wax and proteas, I did foliage, and another girl did chrysanthemums. She has stopped since, and I've had to leave my foliage behind. But, it was just the most wonderful thing I've ever done. I also grew Quandong trees. Native fruit, a little bit like a plum and a peach, and I made jams out of that, and so that was a goer, and could still be a goer—I can't understand why people don't do it. I made jam and chutneys, and also collected gum nuts and put on baronia fragrance, wrapped it up with some rafia, and sold them like mad. Why would anyone buy scented gum nuts? But they sell. My son took on making wheat paper because someone said to me that the best paper in the world was made out of wheat, so we started making paper. It was the most beautiful paper and that sold too, but the marketing was hard—but people still ask about the paper. We had all sorts of things, and everyone got into it and was making cash. It can be done. There's still a million things people could try, but they think they can't.... When you're broke you'll have a go won't you?

As Robinson observes in relation to a similar experience of being directed to interview a particular individual in her research community, 'the praise [for the respondent] is not a reticent reflection of her life being an exceptional one; rather, one which is more

representative of the attributes and personage her community is proud of and respects' (Robinson 1989: 132).

The power of these representations was further reinforced when, after a fascinating interview with a respondent, she was adamant that I should interview her cousin to counterbalance what she thought was her 'non-rural' life experience of a time spent away from Mildura, and single parenthood. She was concerned she was 'not rural enough' for my research, and on her insistence, I interviewed her cousin who, although 20 years younger, told a remarkably similar story to that of the former state finalist above. The story fitted into a genre of rural women's stories with key motifs, which was echoed at rural women's gatherings in 'inspirational' (see Chapter Eight). In my respondent's cousin's case a station (remote outback farm) childhood was followed by nurse training; marriage; derring-do involving an elective caesarean and subsequent rowing across flood water with a new born babies and toddlers; campaigning for school of the air; successful station management and triumph over potential environmental disaster; recruitment on to Boards (see below); and plans for farm diversification and further education.

Following the theme of the 'Bush Mum' being able to overcome false pride and stand up as the backbone of the family, rural women were also praised for their willingness to seek welfare payments for the family in times of financial trouble—perhaps a specific result of the 1980s 'rural crisis' in the Mallee, and the poor harvest at the time of fieldwork. Women's ability to 'cope' and overcome pride was contrasted with the apparent difficulty men experienced in accepting it was time to seek welfare support, or facing up to business failure. One male respondent commented:

I hate to say it but the blokes are pretty ordinary when it comes to standing up for what their families need.

Another woman respondent, commenting on a block family's response to facing up to business failure on the block during the poor harvest, said:

If it was left to the men, they'd say it's too hard [applying for welfare], [their response would be] 'I don't want to know about it.' But it's the women that are the ones that are trying to pay the school fees, put shoes on the kid's feet, food on the table—they know that they have to do something if they want the money. So they might be reluctant, but they know they have to do it. So, they are probably more realistic about the situation, generally speaking, than the men.

The ambiguities between women being expected to take a subordinate role in public and private life (discussed in the following chapters), and yet expected to take public responsibility for 'coping' and supporting the family in times of economic crisis were clear to my respondents. Some respondents suggested (and resented) that in Mildura, as Keenan observed in Malagasay, despite their subordinate role, 'women are associated with direct speech, and they are used by men whenever this manner is useful' (Keenan 1974: 138) and likewise that 'men often use women to confront others with some unpleasant information. Women communicate sentiments which men share but dislike expressing' (Keenan 1974: 137-8).

The notion of rural women raised in rural communities as being 'apprenticed' (Okely 1975) to be more 'obedient' and 'compliant' than their urban counterparts was emphasised by women as being 'learned' during their formal educational experience in a rural community (see below), and reinforced by the expectations of their husbands after marriage (see also below, and Chapter Five and Six). One woman now in her early 40s, recalled that when she moved to Melbourne at 17, the company she worked for preferred to recruit girls from rural areas because they were 'less trouble.' She said:

Looking back we probably had a more fresh faced attitude—'country girl comes to the city they'll do what they're told' sort of thing—because more or less that was what it was like. One girl from Swan Hill came with me, and we were just agog at what goes on, and we were quite happy to just get on with things. We weren't smart alecy like city kids were, we didn't have our own opinions. They were able to push us in the direction they wanted us to go.

It was interesting to read McIntyre and McIntyre's comments in 1944 on the same issue, which amplified women's understanding of a sense of existing in a world of largely unchanging values in Mildura. McIntyre and McIntyre wrote:

The managers of others [rural businesses] told us that their labour was very 'good and steady, especially the girls; they don't get all these ideas about strikes that city workers get.' That is, possibly, because the workers are comparatively small in number, and union members are, to some extent, separated from the body of industrial organisation and action; they tend, too, especially the girls, to be a less active type; they have stayed in their home towns, the more adventurous have left. 'Almost all my girls are good, steady workers,' a woollen mill manager said, '*the flighty ones go off as soon as they can after they leave school, and the ones who are satisfied with what they've got, stay, and make no trouble*' (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 83, emphasis added).

Commenting on the transmission of values between the generations in Norway, Gullestad reflects on tensions and ambiguities which were evident in the personal narratives

provided by her respondents. Commenting on the autobiography of one of her respondents, Kari, Gullestad observes:

She grew up and raised children in an era in which obedience and sharing were ideals, especially for women. In school and at home she learned to be 'kind and skilful' ... There was (and to some extent still is) a stronger emphasis on raising girls to be capable of sharing and self-sacrifice. This is connected to the ideological separation between women's world and men's world ... As a young woman Kari guarded the boundaries of her home by subordinating all her activities to the needs of her family, just like Grandmother. Now, the ideal is rather to be oneself (Gullestad 1997: 209-210).

Similarly in Mildura, it was my experience that the ideal 'to be oneself' or, as the rural women's movement emphasises, women 'fulfilling their potential,' placed women in opposition to both the dominant representations and discourses relating to rural women in Mildura, and the expectations of their husbands. I found that women preferred not to voice their desire for changes in the status quo in public; and that whatever their private views, women were reluctant to participate in public validation of women's achievements which did anything other than complemented men's interests. Thus throughout my fieldwork the ambiguities and tensions between these public and private accounts of women's desires and aspirations remained unresolved.

Finally, and again ambiguously (in the context of the highly visible way in which gossip circulated in Mildura) many of my respondents stressed that the 'naturalness,' and 'honesty' of rural women were qualities that were obscured in the city, or urban life. One woman commented:

I'm a bush person and I hate all the artifice you get in cities. I like people to be natural and to be themselves, and [I have no time for] all the pretence that goes on, I have no time for fuss. I don't put on side.

'Putting on side' was also occasionally used as a euphemism by individual women I met to indirectly criticise other women through veiled speech, notably those who were in positions of influence or power in Mildura by virtue of their education or marriage (see below).

Rural Education and Rural Expectations for Women

Writing in 1947 in his survey of wheat farmers which incorporated the outlying dryland farming area around Mildura known as the Mallee, Holt wrote:

Approximately half the homemakers have not attained the State's post primary standard or its equivalent. There may be several factors in this result, *one of which appears to have been the attitude that education for girls is not altogether necessary* (Holt 1947: 153 emphasis added).

Older women I interviewed reiterated that this view had been part of their educational experience, but often contextualised their remarks to contrast the difference between what had been expected of them as children, and what they hoped would be greater opportunities for their children or grandchildren. All respondents remarked on the positive change over time in terms of expectations for girls, and two women in their forties commented:

Things have changed utterly now, because girls can do anything. I think the only expectation of girls in my day was that they would get married and have kids virtually.

I guess we came from a different era where we weren't encouraged to go and follow our dreams, and I didn't even have any. They'd say an education was wasted on a girl because she would end up getting married and having kids.

The virtually universal experience amongst respondents aged between their late thirties to late seventies was that when they were growing up they were told that the options for women were to aspire to gain a nursing or teaching bursary, marry a farmer, work in a shop or bank, or work as a secretary. It was common for the respondents to tell me that their fathers had not believed that girls should be educated, and one woman told me that her father had regularly said that she did not need an education in order to be financially independent, because 'a man [he assumed her future husband] wasn't doing his job if he couldn't look after his girls [wife and daughters].' Again the ambiguities were clear between male statements of provision and *practice* on the blocks (see Chapter Six).

Even respondents as young as in their late twenties and early thirties told me that at careers evenings at school they were still only being presented with the option of being a teacher or a nurse, and one young parent in her 30s who had grown up in the Mallee, told me that she was shocked when she arrived at the hospital in Adelaide to start her nursing training because she rapidly realised she could have been a doctor—her grades

were good enough, but it had never been mentioned to her as an option. Another woman in her early 40s who ran her own successful business told me:

I was at careers night at school and there were only two things open for girls: nursing and teaching. I didn't want to do either of those, so there didn't seem to be any point staying on. I was completely bored at school, and so when I turned 15 I upped and left. At the time I thought I would end up in a supermarket pressing buttons, but there didn't seem any point in staying on at school. No one tried to tell me different.

Another woman who grew up near Mildura in the 1940s and 1950s told me that in addition to financial barriers, even in remote areas, girls were made very aware of institutional as well as educational challenges they would face should they attempt to attend University. She said:

In those days [the 1950s] you were a school teacher or a nurse, there wasn't anything else for girls in those days. I always wanted to do medicine, but it was out of the question. Financially I couldn't have done it coming from a working class family. And at the time I heard that the Dean of the Faculty did anything to get rid of women.

Thus in Mildura, as in other 'western capitalist societies, schools proved to be central sites for the reproduction of social inequality and for the assertion of cultural hegemony, structured as they are according to values which may be experienced as "natural" or "universal", but are usually selective and specific to particular social classes' (Gullestad 1996b: 30).

Many of the women I met in Mildura were passionate about the opportunities education afforded, and the choices that had been made available to women through more recent educational programmes. This also seemed to be a contributing factor to the older women's enthusiasm for the educational side of CWA; classes through the University of the Third Age; and distance learning. After a very short formal education gained through boarding with relatives in Mildura, a woman in her 60s who grew up on a station told me, 'I've been lucky I've always been able to read and write and spell without an effort,' but said her daughter progressing through university had made her realise that she should become more educated herself, and travel in Australia. She told me, 'because young girls were not allowed to go off on their own it took me 50 years to see Alice Springs,' and contrasted that with the travels of her granddaughter overseas.

In *A Man's Town* Dempsey writes: 'girls will only dream about what it is possible to achieve or what they will not be sanctioned too severely for attempting to achieve'

(Dempsey 1992: 208). However, it was common for respondents I met with younger children, or grandchildren, to say—in what I would suggest was a strategy of resistance—that whenever their daughters or grand-daughters mentioned a prospective career ranging from 'artist' to 'roo (kangaroo) shooter' they hold them what a wonderful idea it was. Others encouraged their teenage and twenty-something daughters in activities which they told me they secretly viewed with trepidation. However, as one respondent told me she could not bear to listen to anyone, even herself, tell her daughter she 'couldn't' or 'shouldn't' do something, or for her daughter to be lacking in confidence, and unable to take up educational opportunities which had been denied to her.

In striking, and perhaps ambiguous, contrast to accounts of their own support for their daughters, women often said that their mothers³⁶ directed their careers towards jobs which were suitable for girls who are 'waiting to be married.' Krystyna told me that when thinking about what to do as a teenager her mother had advised her to train as a nurse with a view to dating a doctor, who, she advised, would be able to buy her a nice car. In interview, it was common for women to describe their first job choice by referring to their mothers arranging work either in their local towns, or in Melbourne. One woman commented, 'all mum could see at the end of it was a cushy well paid job' after her mother arranged a secretarial job for her despite her desire to do something different. Several respondents commented that their mothers had decided that they would not be able to 'cope' with the job of their choice, or ended their education prematurely to establish them in local secretarial or clerical positions. One woman in her 50s who was forced by her mother to leave school at fifteen told me:

In my vintage you didn't train females, you trained the fellas. Although you may have had brains to be trained, and I did, I was just told 'yes you will do a stenography course' and that was it. I would have liked to have had a career, but I was told I would get married young and be a mother young. I had a zest for learning, so kept on training myself all these years.

³⁶ In the same way that respondents referred to their father's limited expectations for women, respondent's attitudes to their mothers could be taken as representative of changing class *habitus* and broader changing social circumstances. In analysing his respondents' commentary on their fathers in his life story project, Roos observes: 'if we recall that the father in the stories represents simultaneously the previous class *habitus*, and perhaps, social and cultural pressures as a whole, we can easily understand that in both cases the extent of social change, the change of one's class position and the simultaneous change of the society is the main driving force behind the stories and their interpretation. What is at stake here is the clash of two cultural models and class positions, together with the general social change which has changed both class positions beyond recognition during the forty postwar years' (Roos 1987: 17).

Echoes of these sentiments can be detected in McIntyre and McIntyre's social survey when they comment on what the local librarian of a country town viewed as perhaps the troublesome aspirations of the local high school girls to extend their knowledge beyond the limitations set by their educators and the local community. They wrote:

Knowledge of what subscribers like may be thought to be the best guide, but subscribers cannot cultivate a taste for what they do not get, and a hint that some at least would like to try something different was given by the librarian who said: 'It's the High School girls it's hardest to please. They ask for these modern poems and plays and *things that no-one else would ever read*' (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 165, emphasis added).

Women told me that even in the 1990s, some family members expected women to leave work after marriage to work in the home, and that despite the work involved in parenting and housework, homemaking was still not considered worthy of an education. In addition, many women suggested that in Mildura it still appeared to be widely accepted by women and men, that men were born to some tasks and responsibilities, and women were born to others. One woman described her three sons as 'born farmers,' but on leaving the interview I wondered if she would have described her daughter as a 'born wife of a post office delivery van driver' (see also Dempsey 1992: 141, on this issue).

'Power Pussies': Privileged and Powerful Rural Women in Mildura

During my fieldwork, the ABC screened a television programme focusing on what the programme producers called 'Power Pussies'—'superwomen' who managed to combine successful careers with raising a family and 'having it all.' The term 'power pussy' does not appear to have the same pornographic connotations in Australia as it does in Europe and North America and after the television programme was screened, the term was used by my respondents to describe a group of privileged women in Mildura who I refer to briefly here. Although access to these women proved difficult, other women I met described them as women who had 'fulfilled their potential' by effectively deploying the symbolic capital afforded to them by their family background, education and husband's status (see also Dempsey's commentary on women's cliques 1990a and 1992). The representations of their position in the town provides an interesting contrast to the experiences of most of my respondents.

'Power pussies' in Mildura were mostly Anglo-Saxon women, often fourth or fifth generation Australians, who received preferential treatment in town by virtue of

typically following a pattern of boarding school education, followed by university or further education; a spell away from Mildura; and then marriage into a relatively affluent family in Mildura to an 'educated' man. By virtue of educational achievement, employment status, and family connections, these women allegedly assumed *de facto* leadership positions in the community, and allegedly formed a closed network to share information to secure advancement for themselves and other women like them, making a choice to establish closer contact on the basis of categorical relations (Gullestad 1984: 19).³⁷ For example, at the time of fieldwork it was rumoured that this exclusive group of women shared information via their book club and discussion circle.

In common with the situation Dempsey describes in *Smalltown* (Dempsey 1990a) I was told that due to their husbands' status, and their own economic power, these women were permitted (to a limited extent) to operate across gender-bounded activities and conventions, and certainly the few women I met (who were described to me as 'power pussies'), used the vocabulary of a life of choice, quite unlike the other women I spent time with. The so-called 'power pussies' emphasised their interest in regular travel away from Mildura, and one 'power pussy' told me—in contrast to other women I met—'I've never been a prisoner here.' 'Power pussies' also highlighted their 'city' experience and connections. Emphasising her metropolitan connections, another 'power pussy' told me 'I'm a bush girl who can get on quite well in the city.' During interview, respondents also told me that such women could choose to access medical care, notably obstetrics and gynaecological care, away from Mildura and could pay to ensure medical confidentiality which, I was told, was often breached in Mildura.

³⁷ Issues of class, and conflicts between women are not foregrounded in the ethnography. That is not to say, however, that class differences and conflict between women did not occur in Mildura. Class differences have been a central focus of other rural studies in Australia (notably, for example, Dempsey 1990), and although respondents sometimes contrasted what they suggested was a 'class-ridden' United Kingdom with the egalitarian, 'classless' nature of society in Australia, some who considered themselves to be 'battlers' commented on 'class' divisions in Sunraysia. These were described to me by as comprising of four 'classes' in Mildura made up of the 'upper class' formed by 'old' (fifth generation) Anglo/Celtic families and the town's professionals (such as doctors and dentists); an upper middle class comprising of prosperous business people; a respectable lower middle class of 'hard working' 'battlers'; and a lower class of 'ferals'—families living on state welfare, assumed to have drug and alcohol problems. I would argue that representations of class divisions in Mildura were superseded by social divisions drawn between the 'ethnic' communities in Mildura. For example, Krystyna often argued that however successful their families became in business, or other spheres of life, 'ethnics' would always be regarded as 'low class' in Mildura. So called 'power pussies' would have been represented as belonging to, or aligned with, Mildura's 'upper class.' Some intimation of class differences between women are made below and in Chapter Seven.

In addition, it transpired that women described to me as 'power pussies' incorporated the handful of women I met in Mildura who fully understood the implications of the state and federal governments' programmes for women, and I was told that some of the 'power pussies' had been strongly influenced by the work of Jenni Mitchell, one of the key workers in the Rural Women's Network in Victoria during the late 1980s and early 1990s. One respondent who others categorised as a 'power pussy' told me:

Jenni Mitchell taught me how to observe the subtleties of discrimination and to understand that they are very real, but not necessarily intended, and how to break down those barriers.

It was therefore interesting to note that the 'power pussies' assessment of the situation for women in the town, appeared to be at odds with the views of many of the other women I spoke to (see for example, a 'power pussy's' commentary on women on Boards below). I was told by my respondents that after the 'power pussies' had broken down the barriers to their own career development, opportunities for other women no longer concerned them. On the occasions I met such women, their discussion of work opportunities focused on personal development issues, which contrasted with the motifs of economic survival or aspiring for greater independence which seemed to dominate my conversations with other women. Another so-called 'power pussy' whose early career development had been facilitated through a state-sponsored women's project, commented that she had now matured in her understanding of women's issues, and thought of herself as a leader in her own right, rather than a leader on women's issues. However, other respondents, told me that she had got what she could from the women's movement, and 'sold out.'

Significantly, one 'power pussy' whom I wanted to interview in her capacity as a member of staff in a rural development organisation, unsuccessfully deployed what I recognised as a series of countermeasures to avoid being interviewed. This was interpreted by some of my respondents as a desire not to be reminded of her former self.

Women in The Public Sphere: Constraints and Restrictions

Respondents often presented women's participation in the public sphere as an arena of subordination in Mildura, which amplified the subordination they experienced within the domestic sphere. When discussing constraints and restrictions for women in public life, however, respondents tended to initially highlight positive changes in women's ability to socialise in public spaces. For example, country pubs were often cited as good examples of

some changes in attitudes and social experiences in recent times. One respondent commented:

In my own life, when I talk about Werrimul, Footy was a great social event, and we had a netball competition that went alongside that. And so, the men played football and the women played netball. And then the netballers watched the footy. And at the end of footy we'd all go to Werrimul, and the men would go in the pub, and the ladies would sit in the cars outside the pub. And there were a few women that actually drank in the public lounge, and those that drank were oh, God, 'bad women,' you know ... That particular pub, Werrimul, now is the most welcoming pub around, and it runs the most fabulous meals, and every meeting in the community is held there for any particular reason, and women are really comfortable walking in there. So it's been a real change in just 20 years.

However, when the issues were discussed in more depth, respondents suggested that in Mildura women were subject to a number of constraints and restrictions in the public sphere. In particular, appropriate behaviour and deportment for women was strictly reinforced through dress codes in Mildura, and all of the women I spent time with, including Krystyna, were always immaculately turned out in public, and followed appropriate dress codes, even in more informal settings. One day in Mildura during the winter on a rare day when it was cold enough to wear gloves, I met a friend in the street and she pointed out that I was wearing one navy and one royal blue glove. The mismatched gloves made her laugh and she said 'God Gill, you're so bizarre' even when I had explained that I was running late and had just picked up the wrong gloves on the way out of the house. On another occasion after a trip to the cinema, one of the people I was with suggested going on for a drink, but one of the other women in the group was very resistant to going on to a bar. She was alarmed that she was wearing inappropriate clothing for that particular activity, even though I was much more casually dressed. She later told me how annoyed she had been by the whole incident and how important it was to dress appropriately in Mildura.

In addition to the more general norms and conventions, many of the bars and clubs had formal dress codes for women and men. In the Workingman's Club, men were not allowed entry if wearing thongs (flip flops) or bare chests, and women were not allowed entry if they were not wearing 'pantyhose' (nylon tights or stockings). On one occasion when I walked into the Workingman's Club wearing an expensive pair of Bermuda shorts and Italian leather sandals, I was stopped and warned at the door, and told that I could not go in because I was 'not wearing pantyhose.' I protested that it was over thirty degrees Celsius outside and it would be ridiculous to wear nylon tights in that temperature, and my accent led to a conversation about my research. As a result of that, I was eventually

allowed in, but warned that I could be asked to leave by another member of staff, and would have to accept my eviction if that happened. On another occasion, when I went to the Club with one of the pickers who was wearing a silk scarf wrapped around her head, we were again stopped, and she was told to remove the scarf 'unless it was an item of religious clothing.'

Mildura had numerous hair dressing salons and at meetings, and in bars and restaurants, I regularly noticed that I would be the only woman in the room with a hair cut that did not require styling or setting, or the only woman in the room not wearing make up. I had thought that fieldwork would be mostly literally field work and had not anticipated involvement in so many social events, but my status as a 'university researcher' appeared to compensate for the fact that (as Gullestad experienced in Norway) 'I did not live up to their standards of how to be nicely dressed and have hair and make up done' (Gullestad 1984: 44). My wardrobe of jeans, t-shirts and two cotton dresses, would have, under ordinary circumstances, marked me as a non-conformist and potentially dangerous woman. For example, Krystyna told me that she felt people were hostile towards her because of her style of dress (fitted and fashionable 'retro' or metropolitan style clothing) and she often recounted the time a man spat at her in the mall when she was wearing such clothing, and her hair was styled in tight dreadlocks. Conversely, she also showed me photographs of herself during the difficult time after Jesse's birth, when she had worn long floral sun dresses with short sleeves in an attempt to gain more acceptance from Andrew's family and friends.

However, it may have been the case that Krystyna's style and interest in tailored clothing may simply have amplified her appearance as a 'foreigner' or 'ethnic' woman, which also drew hostility in Mildura. For example, when Krystyna went to see the local Member of Parliament about service provision for children with Asperger's Syndrome, she told me that she dressed very conventionally and was greeted warmly, but she said that as soon as she opened her mouth and spoke in an accented voice 'it was as if I turned black and the shutters fell down' in the eyes of the local MP. On another occasion, at a meeting I attended a woman tripped over a chair and fell, shattering some glass tumblers and cutting her hand. When I asked who the woman was, the Anglo-Celtic women I was with said simply that she was a 'foreigner,' and they later explained the incident to others by saying that the woman was a 'foreigner' as if this explained her loss of balance and the accident.

Likewise, when I attended another meeting where an Asian woman was giving a short and very engaging presentation about life in her country of origin, several Anglo-Celtic women sitting next to me started saying loudly to each other during the talk that they 'could not hear' what she was saying. However, a visitor from out of town also attending the meeting, subsequently told me that 'it was not that they could not hear, it was that they were not listening.'

'Rural Women' Talking about 'Rural Men' in Mildura

I spent many hours during fieldwork discussing with women the differences between men and women, and their perception of the 'fact' that (although changes were being brought about by the feminist movement in Australia, and the rural women's movement) while women changed, men allegedly remained the same. According to the women I met, this situation was exacerbated in Mildura due to the rural setting, and the cultural context.

It was my experience that women were not in effect discussing rural men, but rather, they were discussing how men in Mildura they knew, were not like women in Mildura they knew. This presented a narrative dynamic which, as acknowledged by Gullestad, presents men as 'objects, seen through the eyes of their wives, girl-friends, and daughters rather than subjects in their own right' (Gullestad 1984: 47).³⁸ However, as this was how the women discussed the men they knew, this is how the material is presented here, first with a discussion of how men *were not like women* in interpersonal relationships, followed by women's views on how women were *not permitted to act like men* in public life.

With the exception of the women who were reporting on their work with pioneering rural men's groups at the rural women's gatherings I attended, and occasional discussion of state and national government concern about levels of youth male suicide, women never discussed with me how they felt about the men's perspectives on the issues they were talking about. This may have been because the style of narrative used to discuss men in Mildura and the contexts in which men were discussed, tended to exclude the possibility of talking sympathetically about men. For example, on one occasion when sitting at Krystyna's

³⁸ Likewise the men who discussed similar issues with me, notably Andrew and his 'mates' Bryan and Noel, discussed how the women in their lives were *not like* their mothers. For example they discussed their view that 'women should stay at home to look after children' as their mothers had; or when women in their lives showed signs of resistance, suggested that they were 'not coping,' or were misdirecting their energies, again in contrast to their mothers (see also below and following chapters).

kitchen table with her and some of her friends I suggested that it was possible to have male friends, and that I had friends in equitable marriages—where for example, the husband took an active role in parenting. The assembled women were sceptical, and one of the women took a moment to depart from her narrative with the stock phrase 'you'll learn in time' before disregarding my remark and returning to her story-telling. I would suggest that such gatherings allowed some of the women present the *only* opportunity they had to express their unhappiness about their subordinate position, and this being the case, they were prepared to 'fiercely protect the inviolability of their separate sphere, that sphere where the defiances take place' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 43).

It was also difficult for me to find out what men thought about men, or issues of rural masculinity—as, for example, discussed in Lawrence (1997)—because like in Smalltown where Dempsey observed 'the things men discuss include work, sport, the relative merits of different makes of cars, trucks and tractors' (Dempsey 1992: 62) in Mildura, when I was present, men talked largely about the aforementioned topics; prospects for the harvest; irrigation systems; what my, or their, favourite food was; or in the case of single blockies, turned the conversation to seek an opportunity to meet up later for a date (see Chapter Five).

Key issues women raised when discussing how men were not like women, were: rural men and boys needing to be 'at the centre of things;' men's fears of 'losing control' of their wives; men's inability to 'multi-task;' men not being able to communicate effectively; and men's 'natural' disposition towards violent behaviour. These are discussed in turn below, and recur as themes through the following three chapters.

Women told me that in contrast to their own educational experience at home and in school, boys in Mildura were raised to consider themselves to be 'at the centre of things,' in charge, and in control. Some respondents said this was so pronounced, that in contrast to girls who were 'never made much of,' young men, particularly those who had excelled in local sports, found leaving Mildura a difficult experience. One woman commented:

Girls would be used to not being made much of, but when one of the young football heroes goes away, suddenly he's away and he's not God's gift to everybody, and I think more often than not the boys lose the plot. Some girls do, but more often the boys. They just don't know where they are. They haven't got anyone revolving around them and they're not worth a tuppenny bit. They are used to the crowd around them cheering them on, and they are used to just going out, and [being able to] do as they want to. Whereas the girls are pushing uphill from the time they were born.

This sentiment echoes Dempsey's observation that in Smalltown 'girls are being socialized for their future roles as wives and mothers and boys are learning to perceive women as their carers' (Dempsey 1990a: 283), and certainly this was a commonplace experience in the upbringing of many of the women I met. For example, one woman commented on her father's reluctance to undertake the simplest domestic tasks, but recognised that progress had been made after her mother had a stroke. She said:

My dad couldn't make himself a cup of coffee until a few years ago because that was women's work. [After his wife experienced a stroke] He's had to learn a lot. He's had to learn to make his own coffee, or if mum went out, he should wash the dishes. It took years to learn that independence, otherwise he was dependent on a woman. Cooking a meal didn't happen. Even now he is very dependent. Women are more adaptable. We do what has to be done.

When discussing young women in business, another respondent said that, 'the young women all have young families, they work all day, and they have their husband *to deal with*' (emphasis added) as a reason for the difficulties the young women faced in attending evening events. The implicit understanding that men needed to be 'looked after' by women living in the household was widespread in Mildura—for example, Clary (Andrew's farm worker) assumed that I would 'naturally' wish to 'look after' Andrew when I arrived to work on his farm in addition to working as a wwoofer (see Chapter Five).

Many respondents told me that men felt the need to 'control' their wives and did not have the confidence to allow their wives to fulfil their aspirations for fear of losing 'control.' One woman told me:

They hide behind that macho thing of 'let a wife out too far, and she will come back too smart and we won't be able to control her,' so better leave her here back under a rock.

Respondents stressed the benefits to family life gained by women fulfilling their potential, and one told me that if men did support their wives,

Women[would] respond ten times over with kindness, affection, lovemaking or whatever. Men are just too dumb to realise they have to help occasionally.

The theme of women 'doing what has to be done,' as opposed to men's reluctance to divert from their own priorities, or whatever task they had in hand, was frequently returned to by women I met. Many respondents suggested that women just 'got on with what needed to be done,' without requiring praise or acknowledgement, whereas men focused on single

tasks and required acknowledgement after they had completed each individual task. For example, one respondent commented:

A man can really say how great a job he did opening a cupboard door. It wouldn't even occur to a woman to remember that she opened it.

The ability to 'multi-task' was frequently identified as one of the central differences between men and women, and the majority of respondents were certain that men and women were fundamentally different in this respect. One respondent expressed what emerged to be almost a consensus view amongst the women I interviewed. She said:

Women are far more capable of doing several things at once, and that must be something in the [genetic] make up. Men and women are different and you can never make them the same. I don't care what anyone says, they are different.

Many respondents asserted that parenting and peer pressure at school, discouraged boys from discussing emotional issues, and claimed that this led to an assumption in school and in home life that boys and men would be poor communicators. Significantly, one of the key problems which Krystyna faced in seeking a diagnosis for her son's Asperger's Syndrome (see Chapter Seven) was that his very poor speech, low level of literacy, behavioural problems, and violence against animals and other children, were viewed in the school as 'normal' male behaviour patterns rather than indicative of other problems. Memorably, when Krystyna expressed her concerns, the school guidance officer told Krystyna 'boys will be boys.'

In adult life, several women felt that it would be good if men could talk more to each other and spend social time together engaging in activities which did not revolve around beer drinking. One respondent thought that Landcare groups were a positive and innovative development in the rural communities, and commented:

Women like to get together and talk. We all talk about how useless our husbands are and what they don't do. We all have a need to talk as women. One of the men I teach with says it's a shame men don't get together just to talk. Men get together to have a beer and socialise. He says 'it's a shame I can't ring up one of my mates and say why don't we go to the pictures.' They can't go the pictures and then go home, like women can do. Women can socialise together and enjoy it and they don't go and get drunk together. Men seem to have to have that alcohol there as an excuse to get together. If two men went to the movies together, everyone would say 'ah they're gay.' They don't have that friendship group that women seem to have. And I think they need it, I think it's time they got their act together, and organised something like that. Maybe these Landcare groups might be the start of something sensible.

Popular books about communication between men and women found favour amongst several of the women I met in Mildura and elsewhere in Australia. A particular favourite was John Gray's 1992 publication *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, and some respondents told me that it had helped them to understand their husband's unwillingness to talk to them, and their husband's need to 'retreat to his cave' (see Gray 1992, Chapter Three: *Men Go To Their Caves and Women Talk*). The other books which were particularly popular amongst the women I met were Steve Biddulph's *Manhood* (1994), and his book *Raising Boys* (1997) which was published towards the end of my fieldwork. It was significant that in Mildura, women read the books and discussed them with other women, but accepted that their husbands were not interested in reading the books. Rather than encouraging men to change their behaviour, it appeared that the books simply led women to what they felt was a greater understanding of unchanging, and unchangeable, gender relationships in Mildura.

The generally light-hearted discussion of how rural women are not like rural men contrasted with women's more serious discussions about domestic violence in rural communities (see Chapter Seven). The alleged male proclivity for domestic violence in rural communities was repeatedly drawn to my attention as something which respondents often represented as an innate quality of rural men. One respondent commented:

It's a heart wrenching thing when you see mum coming in with four kids, the little kid says he wants an ice cream, mum says she has no money, and so says no, and then he starts punching hell out of her—he's just doing what he's seen his dad doing, and in 20 years time his son will be doing the same thing. It we don't stop it with the kids, we've got a never-ending business.

In regard to rural men and violence, respondents theorised to me about the impact of the convict population in Australia and told me that the violence and hostility to women (which according to my respondents characterised the early years of settlement) cascaded in a spiritual sense down through the generations, leaving Australian men with a predisposition to violent behaviour.³⁹ Others suggested that 'traditional' gender relations and 'traditional' family values (which according to some of my respondents included violence against women) were reinforced in Mildura by physical isolation, and the allegedly 'redneck' culture.

³⁹ The contradictions between this folk model and the reality of Mildura being populated by waves of largely European migration since the late 1880s was glossed over in these discussions.

Other respondents, more sympathetically, felt that some men had been emasculated by unemployment, failing farm businesses, or their wives having to take on work to support the family and one respondent commented that: 'if we have emasculated the bloke to the point that he ain't got much going for him, he's probably going to relate in very inappropriate ways.' However there was a clear ambiguity between the expectation, and even acceptance, that men would react to stress by inappropriate and violent behaviour and the expectation that women (as noted above) would stand up as the 'backbone of family.' Failure to 'cope' by women resulted in condemnation—particularly as a 'bad mother' if she had children—whereas excessive drinking, gambling and domestic violence were represented to me as locally accepted coping strategies for men. Whereas women's unemployment was never raised as an issue during fieldwork, when one woman told me that the mechanisation of the local vine fruits industry 'makes me a bit sad because there used to be lots of jobs for boys who need to be busy and working hard,' the subtext was a fear of how men in Mildura would be *allowed* to react to prolonged periods of unemployment.

A Man's Town: Women's Exclusion from Civic Society and Primary Industry Boards in Mildura

Women are still sort of treated as second class in Mildura. They think that you don't have a brain if you are a woman, and you're not worth listening to. How to overcome that in this town? We might all die trying.

The dominant representation of a rural woman's place as being predominantly in the home and domestic realm, and the reinforcement of rigid gender roles through education and deportment, meant that my respondents often described Mildura to me as a 'Man's Town': run by men, for the benefit of men. It was also significant that women's subordination in the public sphere illuminated and amplified, and to some extent authenticated their subordination in the home. This is illustrated below by a brief discussion of women's participation in civic and business life in Mildura, and a commentary on women's exclusion from primary industry and rural development Boards in Mildura.

In public life *The Sunraysia Daily* news coverage was dominated by the male perspective of the citrus and vine fruits industry, and the performance of male sports teams. The medical and legal professionals in town were predominantly male and as discussed in Chapter Seven, were perceived to form a tight-knit community of male interest, authority and control. Only one Club, the Mildura Club, still refused entrance to women but the other Clubs and Bars were still dominated by men. The Municipal Council comprised mainly of

male councillors, and the senior management of major public and private services such as schools and banks were predominantly male. One respondent commented:

I still don't think there's equal opportunity, and by that I'm not talking about where a certain percentage of women have to have a certain percentage of jobs. I just mean there are different ways where women are still kept in control, put it that way, or still held down in a subtle kind of way. But how you teach your daughters and whatnot to cope with that, I don't know. As more women get into business I think that will change. Going back some, you could be earning a salary etcetera, and go to the bank for a loan, and you'd have to get your husband to sign for it. Which I found was pretty appalling, not that it happened to me. The only similar time it did happen to me was when we were getting a loan to build our house. I'd sold my car, and rah rah rah, and the bank manager talked to my husband as if I wasn't there, and I thought hang about, what about me? And there are still things like that go on.

Several respondents discussed the exclusion of women from male networks of influence and control and respondents commented that critical information exchange occurred in exclusively male gatherings, notably between men at Rotary Club meetings, male sports activities, the Mildura Club, and other men's organisations such as the Freemasons from which women were largely excluded (except when performing an auxiliary role). Respondents felt that many men did not consider, or chose not to appreciate, that their ways of working, and the business *habitus* of Mildura excluded women. One woman who had worked in a local company told me:

Where the information was spread, was on Friday night, in the bar, after the boys had finished work, which I was never invited to, because I was a woman. And then apart from that, they would go on to the Mildura Club which again I wasn't allowed access to. It was very difficult to work with these men and understand what was going on, when I was cut off from the communication lines. I am sure that is going on in a lot of different companies.

One woman observed that in professional life it was commonplace for men to talk over women, or to stop listening to women mid-sentence and turn their backs, and apparently 'not notice' they were doing it; and many respondents said they accepted that men were more comfortable in the company of men, rather than women. A business woman told me that men in Mildura 'use their power play much better. We're not very good at it,' and commented that as the male networks seemed to be unassailable it might be of more use for women to form their own business networks to challenge the male domination of the workplace. She said:

Men do that networking and power play, and do it wonderfully, and we must learn how to do it in a softer way. Some men treat women as a joke. I despise

it when men put women down because they are women. A lot of women keep a lot concealed in the work place, and there's a lot we don't hear about. A lot of men use the woman—making her not be who she could be in the workplace. We should do more about bringing that into the open ... it's easy for me to say this, but we need to teach the women to put out their hand on the same level because some of these men have a wonderful facade and are useless men underneath. Paper wise they might be good—only the women know what they don't know. Some of the biggest men are nothing underneath, they really put on a facade, and we women are much more balanced and open, we really are. I say this because I've seen a lot of women. A lot of these mind boggling brilliant men, are not always what they seem.

The male domination of committees which allocated public funding in Mildura was also a cause of some concern to women I interviewed, who argued that the male interest in 'economic development' dominated any discussion about the allocation of public funds in Mildura. One of the women from a voluntary organisation in Mildura staffed predominantly by women (but serving the needs of the whole community), told me how difficult it was to secure funding from the male dominated committees who seemed to find it difficult to appreciate the value of the work of their organisation.⁴⁰ She said:

There are interesting gender issues in this town. Males making decisions about where the money goes to little organisations like ours. Maybe males don't appreciate what we do? There is a female director in Council, but it [change] hasn't come from anyone else. Another challenge for us is to grab men by whatever you grab them by and show them that what we do is as important as economic development and other stuff that men seem to be interested in. It is all important for creating employment, but there is this other side of life, [the] social justice side of life. And that has become a bit of a poor relation. The perspective has changed, it's political as well as local.

Women in Primary Industries and Women on Boards

Despite the critical role women play in the primary industries in Mildura (see for example, Chapter Six) women were rarely featured in material promoting the industries in Mildura, and the absence of women in the local industry organisations and on industry

⁴⁰ See also Gray (1991) who comments 'the ideology which gives domestic caring responsibilities to women is strong in rural Australia, and it is associated with the reluctance among rural local government to adopt human services which many of its male members would see as women's responsibility to their families. The association between these phenomena, by suggesting that women are ideologically placed in the home, and kept there in small part at least by local government non-decision making, suggests local government to be an instrument of oppression' (Gray 1991: 111).

Boards was significant since it provided an highly visible example of women's exclusion from public life.⁴¹

The difference between federal, state, and local discourse on this issue was highlighted when I asked a leading male grower and ADFA (see Chapter Two) office bearer, about women's involvement in the ADFA local branches. He said:

Anyone who is free, able and willing, who wants to, can participate in an ADFA branch. And we have a *few* women. Certainly the participation rate isn't very high, but there's a few prominent women who are involved at all levels. If they're capable and willing to take the next step up in terms of going from a branch or state or federal level organisation ... and their peers are willing to elect them [they can participate]—everything has to go by election.

In addition, when I followed up this line of enquiry by asking whether or not women were becoming involved in the ADFA, or more broadly in the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF), a VFF member told me:

It's still mostly men. If you go along to most meetings here, there will be women there, but in almost all, er, [long pause] on our Branch Committee at the ADFA, we've got one women. At District Council and Federal Council there'd be four or five women out of over sixty. There's none on the standing level that I can recall off the top of me head. With the VFF our committees, they are all males, and we have had a female from the Asparagus Growers, and there's a couple of women getting involved in the work of the committee, but generally these, [long pause] there are women who have talent, but they aren't much confident, not, [long pause] they're not quite there yet. There are women now who talk over business issues, but not with confidence.

The issue of women lacking what men described as 'confidence' was a key theme of my discussions with male and female respondents on this issue.⁴² After being asked about women who were leaders in the local industry, a male respondent described a successful independent business woman involved in an ancillary industry to me and said that 'she had to be really confident' to succeed in business in Mildura. The euphemism of

⁴¹ 'The International Women in Agriculture Conference in August 1994 in Melbourne, played a major part in progressing the Rural Women's Movement's demands for more equal representation on commodity boards and statutory marketing authorities in Australia' (Leipens 1996: 270). As noted in Chapter Eight, this remained a high profile federal policy priority in 1997.

⁴² See also Leipens on this issue who comments 'while rarely using the term 'empowerment' or 'agency' explicitly, women consistently describe their sense of empowerment with three terms: 'confidence,' 'inspiration,' and 'support' (Leipens 1996: 192-3). The ladies of the CWA I met in Mildura also commented on how taking on leadership roles in the CWA had 'got their confidence up.'

'confidence'—and the lack of confidence—was used by men to describe women's ways of communicating during meetings. As can be seen from the respondent's comment above, some women were recognised as having business experience but I was told by men that it was the women's lack of confidence that prevented them taking a more involved role, rather than male opposition to their involvement. One male respondent also commented on a local woman who had attempted to be more involved in industry organisations, but he told me that 'her energies are poorly focused,' that is, it later emerged, her views did not conform to the male perspective on appropriate future directions for the industry.

During interviews I also asked about the local impact in Mildura of directives coming from government, or from within the industry bodies or organisations to encourage equality of opportunity. In response, a respondent from a local industry body told me:

A number of times we've received directives from the Federal Government and Ministers—particularly equal opportunities—with that portfolio, indicating that 'we'd like to see women encouraged' and I suppose we in no way directly encourage them, but we in no way directly discourage them. If they're willing to take up the running, they can stand [for leadership positions] at a branch level. How they perform there will determine whether they go any further. And if their application were received for any peak industry body they'd be treated as equally as well anyone else.

It was notable that major electoral reform⁴³ in the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) and subsequent NFF reforms—which were heralded as a breakthrough and a very significant development at the WARM forum (see Chapter Eight)—were making less of an impact in Sunraysia, as one local VFF activist explained:

[We] had that debate when that was on. Trying to think how it went? To allow women to come on? My memory is a bit hazy on that, sorry. The basic aim was how to get over the technicality of how to encourage women to come in. Encouraging both members of the partnership to take part in VFF affairs. Was it if it was a husband and wife partnership, trying to encourage them to be treated as equals not as a representative of a particular farm? It hasn't really caught on here.

It was my experience that the absence of women on Boards or committees which represented the interests of primary producers in Sunraysia was only viewed as a problematic issue by women respondents. The domination by men of committees and producer bodies was rarely questioned although it was significant that on the rare

⁴³ In June 1995 the Victorian Farmers Federation changed Federation electoral arrangements to two votes per farm membership (Leipens, 1996: 267) in an attempt to take account of the farmer and his or her spouse's views in Federation matters.

occasion that I came across a community group which had a women-dominated committee, one of the committee members told me that there had been concern about 'petticoat government.' The acceptance of the male public face of primary industries in Sunraysia was reinforced by the apparent invisibility of women's labour. For example, a 'power pussy' who was not involved with women who lived on the blocks, told me that she was not concerned about the male domination of the representation of the industry. She told me:

Locally I guess the Dried Fruit Industry is an all male run organisation, but *then it's the men that are doing all the farming*, so personally I don't have a problem with that. Some women might, but I don't.

The absence of women at public meetings relating to the primary industries also served to reinforce this view. During fieldwork a major meeting about the future of the ADFA during the Australian winter of 1997 attracted over 200 people, and when I asked one respondent if he had noticed any women at the meeting he said he noticed around six who had 'come along with their husbands.' He said he noticed this because he had never seen so many women at a meeting before. We had a short discussion about ensuring all community interests were represented at such meetings, and he said his main concern was that some of the older male growers from the migrant communities may not have attended because of possible language difficulties. However, a woman who attended the same meeting told me that the meeting was an example of how women are not included in discussions about the future of the region. She said:

I walked into this room, and it was just a whole sea of black and brown coats, there would have been six women there, and we're talking about the whole situation in this region. I died, the men were all going along and the women were staying at home—it should have been both of them getting involved.

When discussing the issue of women's lack of participation in industry bodies and organisations, women suggested to me that issues such as lack of childcare at meetings and men's perceptions that 'wives and mothers' should not get involved in agri-politics was a more significant factor than the alleged lack of talent or confidence among women. One woman who had been interested in becoming active in local agri-politics was put off by the atmosphere at the local meetings, and said:

Maybe some of the fellas thought it wasn't quite the right thing for a little mother to do, I don't know, I just have that feeling.

Another woman suggested that men were unwilling to look after children at home, or prepare meals for themselves or their children if their wives became involved in this type of activity, a problem relating to perceptions of parental responsibility with farming families with younger children. One respondent said:

The younger ones are busy with their families, but the ones [women] a little bit older than that, I think they're taking part more, going to the meetings and having their say. Not as much as the men do, but someone has to be home with the kids, and it's the man who doesn't stay home.

Another woman told me, 'my husband wouldn't have stopped me, but maybe he would have told me off for saying something he didn't agree with, and anyway I never asked if I could' and acknowledged that she thought her husband would have been concerned that his 'mates' would have thought he could not control his own wife if she did not curtail her interest in industry politics. In addition, respondents asserted that even in the 1990s, agri-politics was still generally viewed as serious 'men's business' with 'women's business' being in the home. One young male respondent commented that, although it was not necessarily a good situation, he did not see the status quo changing. He said:

I think traditionally men have taken the role of being involved in industry politics and the women are the homemakers, we all know the scenario. I don't think it's going to change.

Women I met in Mildura often discussed barriers to their participation in public life. I was therefore surprised when one of the 'power pussies' I met, in defending the absence of women's involvement in her non-governmental organisation, suggested that women were not interested in involvement in 'their husband's' viticulture and horticulture businesses, because their identity was not linked to the farming business. Her influential voice, added validity to the assertions of the men I had discussed these issues with but her view was at odds with my fieldwork experience, and progress reported by the broader rural women's movement. The 'power pussy' said:

Women [in Mildura] don't necessarily have as their identity a strong role in their farming [viticulture] business. So I found like with the women in agriculture type things the diversity is far greater and it is not as easy to organise the women in horticulture, because they just don't see the need. The settlements are closer, they're more urbanised, their opportunity to pursue different career paths to their husband's business is there, and so often they're less likely to be bothered. That isn't to say that there aren't some women who are very silent partners in the business and others who are very proactive, but there's a much broader choice of what they want to do as a person. And so they feel less put down, less need to be seen as well. I really

think the urbanisation of irrigated areas, where you live closer, your choices are wider, the issues for women are different.

She later went on to comment 'when the women are the farmers ... I haven't heard them say that they've experienced difficulty in entering the arena ... [when] any of the agri-political decisions [are being made],' which again contradicted the experiences of other respondents who had, as women, attempted to break into agri-politics in Sunraysia. A leading female citrus grower in the area told me 'I figure if I wanted to get on to Sunraysia Citrus Growers I would have to struggle pretty hard,' and predicted that the only way women would be *allowed* to be involved in agri-politics would be for them to be 'sponsored' by influential men. In addition, several men told me that they thought that women would be satisfied with women in their twenties representing all women's interests, and that women would be grateful for the progression from 'no women' entering agri-politics, to a small number of younger women being involved. One man summarised his view that a handful of twenty-something women entering the industry as bright young graduates did represent progress for *all* women. He said:

I just find that the younger generation of women from my observation are better qualified. They talk about glass ceilings and things like that, but if there's only one percent of the people getting up to that kind of level, there's a lot of people who sort of burnt out on the way, men as well. When you consider in the past that they weren't getting up at all, I think the situation has improved.

In relation to women on Boards in Mildura, some respondents asserted that women did have the experience, qualifications and confidence for participation on Boards, but men were appointed because it was 'their turn' or they were perceived to be a 'good bloke' regardless of their qualifications. In addition, as mentioned below, respondents suggested that recruitment for appointments often took place through men using their traditional business or sporting networks. One woman told me:

The one here is a prime example, when the Land and Water Management Plan was being set up, and they wanted a representative from this area, so the guy who was the chairman went to the men's golf one night, and asked a bloke down there if he'd do it. And that was the community consultation.

The absence of women from the Board of Sunrise 21 (a rural development organisation in Sunraysia) drew particular criticism from women I met. I was told by several respondents that when a male Board member was asked why no women were on the Board of an organisation setting out a strategic rural development plan for Sunraysia for the next 20 years, he had replied 'well, they're aren't any women in this town that would be able to

contribute.' Dempsey also observes that in Smalltown men 'ignore the women, they say, because they believe women have little or nothing of significance to say ... because they lead home-centred lives' (Dempsey 1992: 180-181). In interview, a 'power pussy' employed by Sunrise 21 supported the male Board member in his view, and told me:

The principle is not to *exclude* women rather than to *include* them. It is a male dominated Board, in fact, there are no women on the Board, but the industries themselves are male dominated. Women participating in the industries do not see that they are being excluded. It's different up here in Mildura—I don't know if there is this perception because they are unable to step back and see things that are excluding them, or whether they are not excluded—they are able to come and join in forum if they want to.

She went on to say:

I was thinking about women taking leadership roles and things like that. I think that'll plateau a bit. I think they get on with other bothers ... they do things a different way so they don't need to be the chairperson around different Board tables to influence the change they see is important. They only come out on to the front battleground when there is no other choice I suspect.

She went on to suggest that the 'other bothers' focused on interests in the home, and domestic sphere. Again, the 'power pussy's' views contrasted ambiguously with her own career aspirations and experiences, and with the views of other women who commented that it is predicted that the biggest change in rural development over the next 20 years will be women's involvement in business, rather than engagement in other, domestic, bothers.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the gendered rural context of Mildura, and local representation of rural women and rural men, by women themselves. The quotidian focus on women's representations of their capacity for hard physical labour on the land, an ability to cope with difficult circumstances, the expectation of women's commitment to 'holding the family together,' and the understanding that 'rural girls' are 'less trouble' than 'city girls' suggest that to some extent the women I met were 'apprenticed' (Okely 1975) in childhood, or after marriage, to subordination, and to a life of limited opportunities. Women's representations of rural men have been shown to present some ambiguities, in that men were almost exclusively described by women in terms of how they are *not like*

women. In addition, women discussed the limitations placed upon them by men, and yet also described rural men in Mildura as personally and emotionally limited.

The significance of women's understanding of men, and rural men in particular, as having an innate or 'natural' disposition towards violent behaviour is of significance for later chapters in the ethnography. The active exclusion of women from the public sphere, notably in relation to primary (viticulture and horticulture) production and industry Boards offers a contrast to the national discourse of inclusion and gender complementarity discussed in Chapter Eight.

SECTION II

Overview

The three ethnographic chapters in Section II discuss women's perspectives on how family life is mediated and manipulated to men's advantage in Mildura. The ethnography moves discussion of life in Mildura from the public to the private sphere and focuses on women's experiences of married life on the block, in particular courting, changes after marriage, and work on the block. Women's narratives about how domestic violence impinges on family life in Mildura are then discussed. The consequences of 'gender shock' which, according to Eisenstein, 'occurs within a family when a woman imbued with feminist ideas begins to take her own needs and her aspirations seriously for the first time' (Eisenstein 1991: 4); the consequences of women's resistance, particularly 'moments where resistance crystallises in isolated individual acts or gestures ... [which] may be subtly woven into daily practice' (Okely 1996:212); and the highly visible fate of women who seek to resist the patriarchy of the rural city are also discussed.

In commenting on everyday elements of women's lives and the gender inequality reinforced through daily *practice*, the ethnography seeks to explore gender inequalities reinforced by *habitus* 'insofar as it is a discourse of familiarity ... [which] leaves unsaid all that goes without saying' (Bourdieu 1977: 18). The ethnography also offers an opportunity to discuss resistance in a quotidian context, and how domestic circumstances constrain women in their attempts to create social spaces for themselves beyond the domestic arena.

The influence of male oratory and the ineffectiveness of women's countermeasures in the form of testimony are illustrated. The role that stories play in persuading the listener 'how to think about the matter' (Weiner 1991: 179) is explored through a commentary on how men's narratives manipulated social circumstances to their advantage and thereby damaged women. Following Weiner it was clear that 'like weighted arrows,' words and narratives were effectively projected towards resistant women in Mildura (Weiner 1991: 165).

Likewise, the power of 'the family' as a trope when used in relation to work, marriage, property, the family farm, child custody disputes and local families incorporating immigrant or migrant wives, illuminates the ambiguity of references to the family and family life in Mildura. As Wiener observes:

Tropes refer to past or present events and demand that attention be given to "how to think about the matter." One person directs others to think about experience from his or her own viewpoint and to assess past experience for

future decisions ... The tension created through the use of tropes is situated in the very individuality of the operation, because basically one is saying that "my way is the only way" (Weiner, 1991: 179).

As is shown in the ethnography, these tensions and ambiguities in Mildura were often resolved in the favour of men who repeatedly demonstrated their ability to invent seductive (Wiener 1991) tropes, notably around representations of the family and family life.

It is perhaps significant that the term 'family' was used by respondents in a number of deeply ambiguous ways, and in different contexts, showing that family meant something rather different for men than women. The family was often represented to me in a nuclear or social survey sense, with the family comprising of a married mother and father with their children. The representation by men (who spoke to me about family issues) of this type of *respectable* family forming the building blocks of a stable civic (and patriarchal) society in Mildura, echoed the comments of Holt in his commentary in 1947, who when discussing the family farm, wrote:

The family is the basis of our present civilized society. The quantity and quality of the members of the family determine the character of an individual social group and so the community as a whole (Holt 1947: 47).

However, men's yearning for this type of New Right representation of the family which:

Creates a stark polarisation between Good versus Evil. On the side of the angels is the traditional nuclear family with the nurturing mother at home raising her 2.1 children to believe in the traditional values, and the hardworking breadwinner father out there in the difficult but rewarding world of the paid workforce, bringing home the bacon (Eisenstein 1991: 86),

belied the quotidian reality in Mildura of high divorce rates, and high levels of cohabitation and re-marriage, revealing that family life was in fact a dynamic, complex and negotiable phenomena. Although most of the people I met in Mildura lived without the support of an extended family, it was also interesting that the extended family was often represented to me as an ideal—by women for the childcare support this would afford; and by blockies for the provision of extended family labour on the block. For example, Andrew often slowed down when we were driving past Italian-Australian family's properties and spoke wistfully about Italian families 'working together' for the benefit of the family.

Andrew frequently used stock phrases and expressions around the theme of his desire 'to be a family again' as an oratorical device when indirectly criticising Krystyna. He also used metaphors of family life to discuss his relationship with wwoofers, in spite of the exploitative nature of his interaction with wwoofers on the block. However, I describe how these desires and yearnings were based on his understanding of the family as essentially male kinship networks, within which migrant women were subordinate to patriarchal understandings of what constitutes family life.

In this Section the tensions and misunderstandings between men and women about the appropriate nature of family life, are also amplified through the 'narrative of the gift' whereby gift and commodity transactions within the family are imbued with emotion and meaning. As is discussed in the following chapters, within family life women's emotional investment in work and gifts was transformed by men into conjugal obligations and 'favours' to their benefit.

Forming part of what I suggest is a feminist ethnography, these chapters would therefore seek to support a 'process of fragmentation, of taking The Family apart and dissecting it into those elements that have been seen as making it an oppressive arena for women' (Eisenstein 1991: 88). The ambiguous trade-off between married life and independent life is explored, and I attempt (following Okely⁴⁴) to 'examine the ways in which women evade subordination, as well as how they are 'apprenticed' in these conditions' (Okely 1996: 212). However, as discussed in Chapter Three, the ethnography does not seek to conceal that many of the women I met were at once collaborating with, and resisting, the frequently oppressive circumstances of married life in Mildura.

⁴⁴ 'Sexual discrimination is built right into the natal family and may therefore be the most provocative or most powerful restriction. Even if carefully socialised, women may not automatically be prepared to accept the major domestic role, minimum external economic and political participation, implied inferiority, and greater restrictions on their libido. They will find ways of avoiding them. Simone de Beauvoir (1949: II Introduction) has emphasised the evasions made by women: 'Il est donc nécessaire d'étudier avec soin le destin traditionnel de la femme. Comment la femme fait-elle l'apprentissage de sa condition, comment l'éprouve-t-elle, dans quel univers se trouve-t-elle, enfermée, quelles évasions lui sont permises' (Okely 1996: 77-78).

CHAPTER FIVE

MARRIAGE: ILLUSIONS OF LOVE IN A HOT CLIMATE

I don't quite know why, but I felt somehow that Linda had been once more deceived in her emotions, that this explorer in the sandy waste had only seen another mirage. The lake was there, the trees were there, the thirsty camels had gone down to have their evening drink; alas, a few steps forward would reveal nothing but dust and desert as before.

Nancy Mitford, The Pursuit of Love

During fieldwork many of the conversations I had with women revolved around discussions of the interpersonal relationships between men and women—especially discussion of courting and thwarted expectations of interpersonal aspects of married life. When discussing women's lives in Smalltown, Dempsey observes 'women's subordination is mediated by their interpersonal relationships, and their marriage relationship is the principle mechanism for this subordination' (Dempsey 1992: 247), and I would therefore argue that an understanding of how women discuss these relationships may provide an insight into their subordination, and also how this subordination is perpetuated.

Gullestad observed that in her research in urban Norway the young women she worked with developed shared understandings that they did not necessarily share with men. She writes: 'in the same way husband and wife understand things about each other that are not shared by outsiders to that relationship. Because of the private nature of marriage it is difficult to give a portrayal of these parts of a marriage' (Gullestad 1984: 329). I would concur with this view, and suggest that this chapter reflects on women's representations of their interpersonal relationships to each other, and to a researcher. These relationships were understood differently by the men I spoke to, and again mediated differently in encounters I saw between men and women. As Gullestad again observes:

Men are probably not less moral than women, but they apply more of their energy to different realms of life than personal relationships. They talk about other things when together and do not in the same way debate personal relationships. To some extent women have understandings of their own that are not shared by men, and to some extent they are the ones who are debating, maintaining and changing cultural ideas and values about love and personal relationships. In these realms of life men are the ones who to some extent appear muted and women are the ones who appear articulate and influential (Gullestad 1984: 256).

For most people I met ^{it} in Mildura was inconceivable that anyone would not have marriage as a fundamental life goal, and respondents considered life stories to be incoherent or unresolved if a person's single status could not be explained. This was the case whether respondents were describing their own lives or those of others. On several occasions different people explained to me that the reason for one particular blocky's single status was a 'broken heart' caused by a relationship with a woman, from which he had never recovered fifteen or twenty years ago. Explanatory stories were also recounted for single or divorced women, often through the deployment of veiled language to describe inappropriate behaviour by their former boyfriends or husbands such as 'he wasn't much use to her.' When no story or explanation was available, reliable stories were replaced with speculation. For example in the case of a very well-connected and attractive blonde young local woman, who was 'inexplicably single', comments such as 'I don't know, but I think she was badly affected by her parents divorce'; or 'I've heard it said she's a bit, you know, no one in Mildura is good enough for her;' were appended to any stories told about her single status.⁴⁵

It took several weeks to convince Andrew that not only was I not married, but that I was not divorced—something he remained unconvinced about. The possibility that a man or woman could have made a choice to be single, or could be a homosexual, was never a feature of conversations I had with respondents about single or divorced people. Of all the people I interviewed only two were single (in addition to the two Sisters of Mercy) and they viewed the fact that others expected them to marry as a natural feature of life in Mildura. Writing in 1947 about the fate of unmarried daughters on wheat farms in the Mallee district, Holt observes that 'a measurement of odium attached to spinsterhood was not possible. By the tone of many conversations, however, it does exist' (Holt 1947: 60). He further notes that the spinster had no independence 'and is not likely to have any unless she marries ... circumstances such as these furnish a background for potential insecurity and dependency' (Holt 1947: 60). Despite the aspirations of women for more independence for their daughters, such views still appeared to form 'folk' understandings of prospects for women in Mildura—being single remained a state to be avoided, a state to be in whilst waiting to be married or to be remarried.

⁴⁵ The obvious eligibility of this woman, and the absence of an explanation for her single status remained a troubling issue for my respondents even after I left Mildura. Three years after fieldwork, in Edinburgh, a visitor from Mildura was still perplexed about her inability to provide an explanation of the young woman's single status.

As the title of this chapter suggests, however, here I focus on women's discussions of the paradoxes between hopes for love in Mildura and thwarted expectations and frustrations within marriages. In their marriages they hoped for 'equal' and companionable relationships (gilded with romance), but experienced subordination.

Courting in Mildura

In 1944 McIntyre and McIntyre reported on the reading habits of the local people in the country towns of Victoria, and wrote:

When we asked librarians what people read their first reply was always: Detective stories, wild west stories, and love stories—*light love stories, you know, with a pleasant ending. It's the women who read the love stories; the men like the wild west and the detective stories* (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 167 emphasis added).

A desire for a light love story with a happy ending still seemed to appeal to the women I met in Mildura, despite the evident power imbalances and subordination of women within marriage. Nowhere was this ambiguity more apparent than within the representations of courting in Mildura and in the reflection on the discontinuities between courting experiences and married life. The observations of two women (below) reflect common themes of my discussions with respondents who were hopeful that they could find a happy relationship in Mildura. The younger first respondent described herself as engaged in a campaign:

My goals are getting married, having a husband, having a block and having kids, but I don't think I'm that dedicated. And it's not what I want right at this minute. It's a campaign, and I know I'm never going to meet Mr Right if I only socialise with marrieds ... anyway I've already met a blocky from up the river—he is set for life, but he doesn't talk much.

The second (divorced) respondent, however, was more sanguine:

Ideally, I believe in marriage and a happy relationship. To meet someone, fall in love with someone, get engaged, then get married, and then have your family and work together, that is the ideal, but it seems [to be] only an ideal around here.

The romantic aspirations of the younger woman above captured the commonplace ideal of marriage to a 'man on the land' which was often repeated to me by women in Mildura. To her, the idea of being a blocky's wife, settled in a substantial block house with a husband

with what she thought (persuaded by the promotion of the ADFA and other industry bodies, and the persuasive fictions of Australian literature) would be a regular and stable income, appealed considerably. The valorisation of the 'pioneer' and of the 'man on the land' supported these ideals, and the power of these images were fuelled by Australian Country and Western songs which recounted tales of beautiful pickers falling in love with rugged blockies. My respondent's mind was on a man who lived some distance from Mildura, and her assessment of him as someone who was 'set for life, but he doesn't talk much' initiated conversations about her romantic vision of the future, and her thoughts on interior design for his block house. I, however, suggested to her that the alternative scenario could be that he had 'nothing to talk about'; lived in isolation some miles from Mildura; was very dependent on his mother who I understood had only recently moved off the property following the death of his father; and, given the problems of the dried fruit industry, the block was likely to be financial trouble. She dismissed this argument, and observed that socially 'anything would be better than being single in Mildura.'

Two respondents (both men) felt that women were less captivated by the romantic notions of the 'bushman,' and told me that women were now not considering marriage to 'subsistence growers,' but were rather looking for a more 'corporate lifestyle.' One male blocky told me that women were now more discerning in their choice of blocky husband. He said:

Women want a style of life that supports their dreams, ambitions, etcetera, [and] for their children and so on. So there might be some hesitance to marry a grower still growing dried fruit with one ton to the acre on a very poor subsistence type block, but particularly now when there's a good living to be made from fruit blocks with the wine—not that I'm suggesting they're gold diggers—but if they marry someone with a corporate type attitude, they're going to get a return on their investment.

Significantly, the views of women who had grown up on blocks, who suggested married life with a blocky meant marriage was a labour of love (or subordination) rather than a 'romance,' appeared to be muted by the valorisation of the local industry. One woman told me that she had always suffered the consequences of suggesting in public that there was more to life than growing raisins, and another said that as a blocky's daughter she always swore she would never marry a blocky because of the level of work involved. She said that although it all seemed to be very romantic to live on the land, she had distanced herself as soon as possible from that lifestyle. She said:

I always swore I'd never be a blocky's wife, because I was a blocky's daughter and I saw how hard they [the women] had to work. Pruning and picking.

Working very hard. I remember as child, during war we couldn't get male labour and we used to go and help pick and then with shaking the racks—it wasn't like today—we had to stand and go 'whoar,' and I used to think we were going to raise up to the heavens and down again. Then we'd be raking the fruit out. Eventually dad had to make a smaller box so we could box the fruit because he just couldn't get man labour power. I just did all that as a teenager, but my mum did it all of her life, and had the kids and the house to look after. I got married and left all that behind.

Discussion of Courting

In contrast to the sense of agency expressed by my younger respondent (above) as she looked to future possibilities, the majority of my respondents were casting a retrospective gaze over their courtship and marriage. Their representation of the issue of choice, or rather the absence of choice in their marriage, was a key motif in their personal narratives and in conversations. The representation of the absence of agency in the younger stages of their lives formed a key part of 'the management of inadequate causality' (Linde 1993: 135) in respondents' personal narratives. Much of the discontinuities between their narratives of romantic aspirations and thwarted expectations in marriage; and between subordination within a marriage and zest for living outwith the domestic sphere, was accounted for by falling in love.

To this end, many of the older women I met in Mildura discussed their courtship and decisions to marry *as if* they had no agency in the process. Several women said 'oh I just I fell for him,' and when I asked women about how they met their husbands, the 'fall' was sometimes recast a mistake, a stumble, or an absence of balance. Just as some women described their choice of jobs or pre-marital career path as being determined by their mothers (see Chapter Four), others described the decision to marry as their future husband's decision rather than as a joint decision. For example, a former teacher⁴⁶ told me that after moving to Sunraysia as a newly-qualified teacher and then moving on to another school outwith the district, 'my husband decided that he'd like me to come back. I hadn't made up my mind when I left but he had. He kept visiting, and so I finished up here.'

⁴⁶ In the past teachers were regarded as 'quite a source of recruitment for farm wives' (Holt 1947: 61), and even at the time of fieldwork, I was told that 'when a new [single female] teacher comes all the single farmers [and blockies] are a bit interested.'

To some extent, as noted above, respondents suggested that some local Mildura women had the 'good sense' not to marry a blocky, which meant that migrant women and young women moving to the district for work (especially pickers) were regarded as particularly vulnerable to the blocky's attentions. For example, when I first met Krystyna and asked her how she met Andrew, she said that she had just 'fallen for him' and changed the subject. She later told me that she had met Andrew when one of her work colleagues organised a dinner for the social workers and their friends. Her colleague sat her next to Andrew, and after that she said he was very attentive throughout their courtship, and simply 'would not leave me alone.' She said she was flattered by the attention at the time and although she was five years older than Andrew with two girls of her own entering their teenage years, she was attracted by the life on the land that she thought living with Andrew would offer. She told me that she had very fond memories of time with her grandmother who had a family vineyard in the Rhine valley, and that before she emigrated to Australia she had read Australian bush stories about the pioneering lifestyle. In retrospect, she said that after her first marriage ended, she thought she was hankering after some of her grandmother's happiness, and thought that she would please her mother and stepfather by following on with a 'family tradition' of a life on the land. Also in retrospect, Krystyna said that 'falling for Andrew' was an easy mistake to have made because she had no understanding of what Mildura blockies 'were really like.' As Eisenstein observes:

Like the politics of the family, sexual politics within the heterosexual couple was disguised by the concept of love, with its elaborate ideology of romance, sharply deconstructed by Firestone [Shulamith Firestone] in her commentary on the meaning of 'falling in love.' That there was a micropolitics of interpersonal power between men and women became a founding assumption of radical feminism, underlying the subsequent analysis of issues such as rape, child sexual assault and wife-battering (Eisenstein 1991: 91).

Krystyna told me that Andrew's mother had pushed for her to marry Andrew from the earliest stages of their courtship. Krystyna thought that for Andrew's mother, marriage was both a resolution and solution, akin to 'passing a relay baton,' which would relieve her of the responsibility of 'looking after' Andrew. Reflecting the motif of the absence of agency common in many accounts of marriage in Mildura, Krystyna told me that following a short courtship, she agreed to her and the girls living together temporarily with Andrew to 'see if they were a match or not.' However, Andrew's mother insisted that they should get married immediately, and Krystyna said to me that 'before I knew it' Andrew's mother had organised a wedding, and she was getting married in a white gown in front of over one hundred of Andrew's friends and relatives.

Likewise, when I was working on Andrew's block, as soon as it became known that there was a single woman working on the block, it was assumed by Andrew's male friends and neighbours that I would have a long term interest in marrying a local blocky—if not Andrew, then one of his friends or neighbours. This assumption was immediately acted upon by one of Andrew's mates, Noel, who (I was told) had recently summarily ended a relationship when he found out that his girlfriend would not be able to have children. On our first meeting, after a normal first five minutes of conversation, Noel took the coincidence that my sister had recently worked as a adventure holiday trek leader in Nepal, and the fact that he had recently been on an adventure trek holiday in Nepal as a sign that we should spend time together. He then proceeded to ask me if I liked a variety of activities, including dining out, dancing, playing sport, keeping score for sports activities, and church-going, all of which were followed by an invitation to take part in these activities with him. Undeterred by my polite refusal of all of his invitations, he invited me to visit his property. I refused again, but on one Saturday afternoon after lunch with Andrew, Noel insisted on taking myself, Andrew and Bryan (another of Andrew's mates) over to his property to see new technological developments on the block and his holiday photographs of his trip to Nepal. The ownership of a high performance sedan car and speeding in these cars was viewed as prestigious amongst the male blockies (see also Chapter Six), and on the way to his property, I was invited to sit in the front seat of Noel's sedan. Noel drove at what I thought was a dangerous speed, so I told him that he should slow down and observe the speed limit for the safety of everyone in the car. He reduced his speed, but later Krystyna and others, told me that it was only during courtship that a man would take a woman for such a drive; allow a woman to sit in the front seat of the car if other men were in the car; and that only during courtship would a man respect a woman's request to slow down.

When Andrew's neighbour Pete heard I was staying on the block, he appeared on Andrew's property for the first time in seven years for a visit, ostensibly to pick up some spare lemons from Andrew, claiming that the frost had damaged his crop and wondering if Andrew had spare fruit. Andrew had not harvested any lemons, and so I went down to the lemon trees and helped Pete and his father pick the lemons. We had a polite conversation and Pete invited me round to his property to see his new irrigation system. Later, Andrew said how surprising it had been to see his neighbour, but a few days later when passing the block, Pete parked his jeep on the roadside bordering the block, and offered to help me plant pumpkin seeds which Andrew had decided to plant between the vines as a cash crop. We worked our way down one row, exchanging pleasantries and at the end of the

row, Pete grabbed a gold cross I was wearing and yanking it and me towards him, said I should be careful not to lose it, and then stroked my cheek which was dripping with a mixture of sweat and sunblock and said I was 'very hot.' He then also invited me around again to see his irrigation system, to which I made a very non-committal response.

Undeterred, two days later as I was cooking dinner, Pete appeared at the kitchen door spruced up in a smart shirt and trousers. He then sat at the table, told me I had beautiful hands, and told me about his Greek heritage, his trip to Europe and his current business, and sat in the kitchen talking all evening—first over dinner, and then over bottles of beer with Andrew. He eventually left, leaving his phone number with me, grabbed my hand and planted a kiss on my cheek saying he hoped to hear from me soon. At that point I lied by saying I would be in touch after New Year. Throughout the interlude there was an implicit assumption that I, as a single un-propertyed woman, would be interested in a propertyed man. After receiving a similar approach from a different blocky, which included a suggestion of sharing a room in a hotel on a weekend away from Mildura as a 'first date,' another respondent told me:

Do we have to go to another country to be treated like nice human beings? I think the women are sick of it. We're sick of it. We're sick of it. I want to be treated with respect thank you very much ... I even think it would be lovely to meet someone nice. I would still like to share my life with someone, but where are they? This fellow's approach was atrocious—good God, his approach was to ring up and ask me to go on a dirty weekend—I thought is that the modern approach? I went right off him. This is an Aussie fellow. This is how you talk? I was horrified. [He] wouldn't get to first base talking like that—I would want to be treated with respect thank you very much.

I soon discovered that Andrew's neighbour had married three times already, and had an 18 month old child from his most recent marriage. Respondents told me that allegedly all the wives and their children had left him because they did not conform to his expectations of 'family life,' modelled on what I was told was the 'post-war rural Greek family tradition.' However, Pete was not disheartened by my negative response and after New Year when the pickers arrived, he transferred his affections to them. He expressed his devotion first to Breida from Ireland, and then to Doris a 'gun [fast] picker' and farmer's daughter from Germany, sending her a beautiful bunch of red roses and a declaration of love on her last day of harvest. Doris was amused by the gift, but set off for Sydney the following day as planned, and left the roses and the note on the Formica topped table in the pickers quarters for the remaining pickers to enjoy.

I asked Krystyna if this style of courting was what she meant when she had said Andrew 'did not leave her alone,' and she said this was the Mildura style of courting and that in the past *she* would have been convinced by the flowers and the note. The understanding and misunderstanding of the role of gift giving between men and women in Mildura took on a particular significance in personal narratives focusing on interpersonal relationships. As Maschio observes:

The narrative of the gift is defined in part by the gifts, or contributions, given to a person and given out by that person, and *also by the memories and feelings evoked by such contributions* (Maschio 1998: 85).

Therefore, when discussing Pete's flowers for Doris with Krystyna, she reminded me that weeks previously, when she had argued with Andrew about financial support for Jesse I had cycled round to her house later on in the day, with a rose from Andrew. On delivery, I had explained to Krystyna that as I was about to leave the block, Andrew had said 'hang on a minute' and clipped a rose from the climbing rose bush outside the block house, saying 'this usually works.' He had then asked me to give the rose to Krystyna. On that occasion she had thrown the rose away immediately, but said that in the early stages of their marriage, she had taken the gift of roses as a sincere gesture of love and apology. As Weiner observes:

Objects are heavily weighted with the social implications of past relationships and obligations, prior to the statements they make concerning individual desire in the present (Weiner 1991: 181).

Doris's rejection of the roses amplified Krystyna's sense of being deceived by her emotions in the past, but also reminded her of her attempts to disentangle herself from the seductions of gift exchange within marriage (see also Chapter Six).

Older respondents told me that in their youth, acceptance of expensive gifts was viewed as indicative of commitment to an engagement and consequent marriage, and one woman told me that despite being desperately in love in the early stages of a life-long successful marriage, she had refused to accept a gold watch in the early stages of courtship. She contrasted this with her granddaughter's collection of what she viewed as extravagant gifts from casual short-term boyfriends. This woman found her granddaughter's acceptance of gifts surprising given how such gifts were viewed in her own youth. Other respondents told me that the more racy teenage girls and young women in Mildura now regarded courtship gifts (including cannabis) as a 'fair trade' for sexual favours. Significantly, however, in contrast to Dempsey's coy suggestion that women exerted sexual

power in the bedroom (Dempsey 1992: 12), I was told that sexual favours were only regarded by men as 'favours' to trade during courtship, and were incorporated into a husbands conjugal rights after marriage.

Gifts also seemed to play a particular role in raising expectations about married life, and this prompted discussion in interview and conversation about the significance of the acquisition of wedding gifts and consumer durables during courtship and engagement. Some respondents suggested that in the early stages of marriage, the coveting of consumer goods by women eclipsed the significance of the interpersonal relationship itself and later overshadowed the importance of developing the 'family relationship.' One grandmother commented:

I think it's a lot to do with pressure. When we got married, and my kids would say 'oh yes Nan's back in the dark ages,' you didn't have to have a fridge, you didn't have to have a washing machine. All you had was an ice chest, and you washed by hand. Nowadays the young people expect it, they've just got to go in there with all these bits and pieces, and it's all right when two of them are working in the family, but once they get down and they start a family and you've only got one wage coming in, there are great difficulties there because they aren't being able manage on their one wage because they've over committed themselves. There's a pressure to have all these things. They don't know how to wash without a washing machine or anything. You do a nice hand knitted jumper, and in it goes into the washing machine. Can you understand that?

She also expressed concern that in the 1990s when women did have, she thought, more choice about whether to marry a man, they were distracted by the acquisition of consumer goods as wedding gifts, and not focused on the content of the character of the man they were about to marry. Some respondents also suggested that younger women were labouring under the illusion that their husband would 'match' the gifts and commodities they acquired in advance of their married life. I was told that the expectations built up by close reading of wedding magazines; advertising; and the attention given to brides in *Mildura*, simply amplified the sense of thwarted expectations when the husband was *not* transformed into a 'designer,' or what some women called a 'television' husband. I was told that a common post-wedding comment from husbands when women faced some of their husband's less endearing habits was 'you knew what I was like when you married me'—but as Krystyna suggested (above) this was apparently not always the case.

For some respondents, the apparent distraction of gifts and thoughts of romance amplified what Gullestad identified in her work in Norway as a generational difference in women's approach to marriage. She writes:

Older women seem to have a more practical attitude towards marriage, not only because of age and experience, but also because that was what they were brought up to expect. Younger women expect more intimacy and more passion. Contemporary marriages are not primarily based on love as habit or love as tenderness, but on passionate romantic love. Spouses wanted more intimacy in their marriages, they want to share emotions and experiences as well as more trivial household tasks. They value falling in love and have high expectations of sexual gratification. At the same time there are strong expectations that the romantic love will last over time and that it will be monogamous (Gullestad 1992: 110).

In the same way, some older respondents also suggested that younger women's expectations were too high. One respondent commented:

The expectations are too high that's for sure. You hear of them, they get married today and six weeks later they're apart because they don't give of themselves. They are not prepared to give of themselves, and give and take. There's always got to be that one [of the couple] that if you have a blue that's got to say well perhaps you're sorry and you can work it out another way. No marriage goes along without a blue. You'd be fibbing if you said you were.

Yet, falling in love in Mildura (particularly with the man on the land), and dreams of wedding gifts, remained as 'one concrete folk utopia in everyday life' (Gullestad 1992: 54), and contrasted with Dempsey's assertion that 'love, it seems, is to be expressed by being an attentive and enthusiastic support of a husband's *provider* activities' (Dempsey 1992: 158). Similarly, when discussing arranged Bedouin marriages, Abu-Lughod remarks that the young women:

Do not object to the fact that marriages are arranged for them, but they do resist particular matches, mostly those which do not promise to fulfil certain fantasies. What they say they want, and often sing about in short public wedding songs, are husbands who are rich (or at least wage earning) and educated (or at least familiar with a more Egyptian way of life), *husbands who will buy them the things they want—the dressing tables, the beds, the clothes, the shoes, the watches, the baby bottles, and even the washing machines that mean the end of backbreaking outdoor work* (Abu-Lughod 1990: 50 emphasis added).

When the attention the women received prior to marriage had subsided, and the gifts they received had been subsumed into the block house (see below), women in Mildura appeared to yearn for a revival of the attention they received during courtship, and to cling to the hope that what was recast in retrospect as an 'illusion' of love during courtship, could still be transformed into emotional validation for themselves within marriage.

Changing Relationships Within Marriage

Gullestad comments that in Bergen, 'once a woman marries and has a child, temperance and moderation, plus other qualities are supposed to be exhibited by that woman, and men are supposed to respect both the new image and the new woman' (Gullestad 1984: 131). Conversely, in Mildura, women's personal narratives on changes after marriage focused on the change in the relationship between themselves and their husbands after marriage as a life-transforming 'surprise.' Several respondents commented that 'everything changed overnight,' and tellingly, some women said that looking back, they felt as if after marriage they had become another part of the block property.

Few of the women I spoke to said that they had ever discussed their expectations of married life with their prospective husbands before getting married, and their remembrances of the early years of married life often included a recollection of their surprise that tensions existed between their expectations of married life and those of their husbands.

In retrospect, several respondents were able to reflect on how the changes in the relationship from courting to married life was amplified by the move from their family home or rented accommodation into their husband's block house. Several commented that, on reflection, they could see now that their husbands had been born and bred in the same house, and rarely been outside Mildura, and had seen no role models for women other than their own mothers. This had led their husbands (in retrospect, 'understandably,' their wives now suggested), to assume that their new wives would take on the same household roles as their mothers, and would prioritise the needs of 'the husband' and the block above all other aspirations. The spatial arrangements of the block as a working enterprise, and the labour arrangements (see Chapter Six) amplified the existing gender asymmetry.

The importance of the blocky's mother as a role model for appropriate wifely behaviour, was illustrated by Andrew's representation of his mother's life on the block. During my time on the block, he repeatedly detailed his mother's commitment to raising children and supporting the family. For example, he described how she had never given Andrew or his sister to 'strangers' to look after and never considering paying for childcare; often commented on her skill and commitment to developing cash crops such as table grapes for supporting the family; and regularly praised her culinary skills. To me these seemed to be examples of powerful veiled speech, which prescribed how women should prioritise their

work and time commitments, while indirectly criticising Krystyna by implicitly suggesting that she did not subscribe to these ideals.

Some respondents suggested that the rhythms and repetitions of life on a block, which involved days of extraordinarily repetitive labour, reinforced the blockies' reluctance to change. In addition, many of the women said that whilst they had travelled away, or moved between different parts of Australia, the world of their husbands had always been focused on the same property, work, sports and leisure pursuits, which none of their husbands saw reason to question or alter. When one respondent said, 'it's really hard because a lot of them are very traditional: they like to do it like how their Dad's did it,' she went on to say she did not just mean viticulture and horticulture, she meant everything. Another woman drew the allegory between the blockies' resistance to change growing and marketing practices, with their resistance to change their domestic arrangements. In referring to the need for change in attitudes to product marketing, she said:

A lot of farmers are still believing if they've grown something it should be able to be marketed. We all know the days are gone when you can just grow a product and let it go out of the gate and it gets marketed. It doesn't happen any more. You've got to know what your market wants, and you've got to grow to that market ... so many things we did in the past are wrong and we've got to stop those practices. If people still rely on what their fathers did, the industry won't survive. It's up to them.

Significantly, Andrew consulted his father's diaries to plan his work on the block, and often stressed his interest in *repeating* his father's and grandfather's achievements on the block.

The block house itself also played an important role in apprenticing women to the rhythms of the husband's life and household arrangements. Carsten and Hugh Jones comment that:

The house is an extension of the person; like an extra skin, carapace or second layer of clothes, it serves as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect. House, body and mind are in continuous interaction, the physical structure, furnishing, social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, moulding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold within its bounds. *A ready-made environment fashioned by a previous generation and lived in long before it becomes an object of thought, the house is a prime agent of socialization* (Carsten and Hugh Jones, 1995: 2 emphasis added).

Women recounted to me that they felt that the unchanged, and unchanging, block house represented a broader expectation that they would 'fit in' to their husbands home rather than establish a joint family home. Camps and Hernández observe that 'a house is where a family lives: the way in which it lives there can make it into a home' (Camps and Hernández 1997:72). Likewise, Gullestad comments that:

Tending to the home is one of the ways in which individuals and families create and express their identities. The home plays an important part in the constant negotiation of social boundaries and social identities (Gullestad 1992: 51).

As with other women I met in Mildura, however, Krystyna said she never felt 'at home' in her husband's block house, and respondents told me that they were denied the opportunity to appropriate any space in the house as their own. In Andrew's house this was powerfully demonstrated by the interior decoration—the house was decorated throughout in muted tones of beige, with the dramatic exception of the kitchen which was painted red and white. I had only ever seen kitchen decor like this before in Germany, and when I asked Andrew about his choice of colours he said that it was Krystyna who had painted the kitchen red. Krystyna later told me that painting the kitchen had been a moment of resistance and triumph in her time on the block. She said that Andrew's acceptance of the colour, and his help in building a kitchen table with a matching red Formica top, had been as important to her as him resisting his mother's views when Krystyna persuaded him to convert the block to organic production techniques. Krystyna often described the time they had spent working together on the kitchen as a moment that gave her hope that she could 'hope for the best' and hope for changes in his behaviour within their marriage. As Gullestad suggests, Krystyna cherished this activity as a project of love. Gullestad writes:

Making home improvements is in a special way an expression of a man's love for his wife. He is doing something for her and shows that he gives her and the family a high priority in relation to other activities outside the family. For couples, home decoration can therefore be said to be a project of love (Gullestad 1992: 85).

However, Krystyna also told me that she caused a major controversy in the block house by putting an aboriginal land rights sticker on the Jones' family refrigerator, and having feminist books on the family bookshelves in the lounge. Many of the books such as Simone de Beauviour's *The Second Sex* contained references to 'sex' in their titles, and some members of Andrew's family denounced Krystyna as a 'sex maniac.'

Respondents told me that even the gifts and commodities acquired during courtship and on marriage were absorbed into the husband's house and appropriated as his or his family's property after marriage. For example, when I was on the block Andrew regularly complained that Krystyna had taken all of 'his' utensils, pots and pans when she moved off the block, but Krystyna's later told me that these were the utensils that she had taken to the block when she married Andrew. This illustrated the common assumption in Mildura that when women sought to leave relationships, they should leave without the right to remove property from their husband's family home (see also Chapter Six and Seven).

Power and authority were transformed in the block house and on the surrounding land and on reflection, some women even suggested that whilst they hoped that they were moving to the block as a wife, their status in the household was more akin to that of an employee. The material reality of the house amplified the gender inequalities within the marriage and in some respects, it could again be argued, as some respondents did, that little appeared to have changed since McIntyre's survey in the 1940s. He wrote:

Very few housewives were consulted, but the indications were that women are generally more dissatisfied with the houses than the men. 'The woman is the boss of the house and the man of the block' was a view expressed by one grower and probably true of most families. The man is aiming to make the block pay and tends to forget about the house; the woman's life and work are mostly in the house; she has to 'make do,' and often, though she is dissatisfied, she gets used to inconveniences. One woman who said she was satisfied with the house added that she could still see a lot to do to it and probably never would be really content with it, although she considered she had a reasonably comfortable home. This idea of not being completely satisfied, but 'making the best of it,' also applies to conveniences about the home (McIntyre, 1948: 104).

Significantly, I encountered no households in Mildura where a woman had married a man who had moved to stay with *her*, in *her* house, on *her* block. As Schaffer observes, in the nationalist tradition, the bushman only exists within a masculine category. She writes:

The position of a 'native son' [farmer or blocky] could, however, in *an exceptional circumstance*, be filled by a woman. That is, the bush woman can stand in place of her husband, lover or brother and take on masculine attributes of strength, fortitude, courage and the like in her battle with the environment. She could be called and have the status of a pioneering hero, even though she is a woman (Schaffer 1988: 14 emphasis added).

I met women 'farming alone' at the rural women's gatherings who had taken over 'their husband's farm' after their husbands had been killed or disabled in exceptional and often

tragic circumstances. However, it seemed to be that women who attempted to take on a block or farm, under anything other than *exceptional* circumstances would be seen as unable to 'cope' with the rigours of farming or block life. For example, at the property I wwoofed on intermittently in Rutherglen, the farmer (a woman) had achieved remarkable goals on her property, took calculated business risks, and was generating prosperity for associated businesses in the surrounding area. However, it was very noticeable that during tea or coffee breaks if ever the farmer was attending to other business, the visiting male tradesmen and casual workers told me one after another, that they thought the farmer was 'taking on too much,' and one day would not be able to 'cope.' Conversely, men on neighbouring properties pursuing similar aims, less successfully, were described as 'go ahead.'

Likewise in Smalltown, Dempsey recorded community opposition to women's public participation in primary industry and noted the critical issue, also apparent in Mildura, that if a woman was to farm in her own right she was likely to scupper her marriage chances. He writes:

Our respondents knew, for instance, that a girl who farmed in her own right was likely to be perceived as a vicarious male rather than a suitable partner for marriage, or a suitable candidate for motherhood ... the failure of most girls to aspire to the more rewarding male-dominated jobs was probably closely linked to the strong belief in Smalltown that marriage and motherhood were of over-riding importance in a woman's life, and the girl's awareness of community opposition to women putting a career ahead of motherhood or support for a husband's career (Dempsey 1992: 203).

Significantly, the one woman I met in Mildura, who at first revealed to me that she was managing the block while her husband did other work, later refused to be interviewed for fear of being identified as a woman running a block and the reaction towards her family that this may entail.

'Looking After' Husbands and Sons

When women discussed with me their surprise at changes that occurred within their relationship with their husband after marriage, the importance of male oratory in defining and transforming social realities was exemplified by their accounts of women and men conveying very different understandings of who was going to 'look after' whom in a marriage. Women often told me—in interview and in conversation—that during courtship their fiancés had told them that they would 'look after' them, and the attentiveness and

gift giving they experienced during courtship had been accompanied by repeated verbal statements of their suitors' intentions to care for and cosset them, throughout their married life. However, they told me that after marriage it rapidly emerged that the women were expected to carry out the cossetting and 'looking after,' notably taking on or supporting the mother's existing caring relationship with her son. One woman said that her husband had told her during courtship that he was going to 'wrap her up in cotton wool,' but after eight weeks of marriage when they were threatened with the electricity supply being cut off, it emerged that he expected her to deal with all the accounts on the block and household, because, he said, he 'didn't like opening bills,' and then revealed a drawer full of unopened bills and financial demands which she had to deal with.

While I was working on Andrew's block, the conversation between Andrew, Clary (the unpaid farm labourer) and myself often turned to who should be 'looking after' Andrew, because while I was working on the block his mother (who now lived in her own house in Mildura) was away on an extended vacation. One evening around the kitchen table, after I had worked all day on the block in 30 degrees Celsius heat and cooked dinner, Andrew and Clary discussed who was 'looking after'⁴⁷ Andrew now that Krystyna had 'gone away,' and his mother was on holiday. Clary said that I should 'look after' Andrew, to which I said I was in Australia for fifteen months only, and was definitely returning to my life in Edinburgh. Then Andrew mused that he supposed his mother would still look after him, and Krystyna would probably come back eventually. Clary, however, felt that the issue was unresolved, as no one was 'looking after' Andrew at that moment, and he often returned to this theme in conversation as we worked together on the block during the following days. Clary then unexpectedly rotavated the overgrown vegetable garden established by Krystyna, and told me that it was important that I planted vegetables in the evenings because Andrew needed to save money on food bills, and this would help 'look after' Andrew. He then bought some packets of vegetable seeds in Mildura and prompted me numerous times, after a full days work, to plant up some seeds before or after cooking dinner for everyone.

It did not seem to occur to either Clary or Andrew, that Andrew should be looking after himself, an issue highlighted to me when I asked Andrew in the supermarket what sort of

⁴⁷ See also Dempsey who comments 'we were present at several lengthy exchanges between farmers and their wives that were stimulated by a wife claiming that she needed a 'job of her own.' In each instance the husband rejected the suggestion, claiming that the wife should be able to find all the fulfilment she needed by helping with the farm and in the ways described above, and by '*looking after the children and me*'" (Dempsey 1992: 161 emphasis added).

washing powder he used, and he said he did not know. Shortly after that, one day when I was loading the washing machine with my clothes, Andrew sneaked up behind me with a pile of his clothes, and as I switched the machine on he stepped in front of me, flipped open the lid of the top-loading machine, and stuffed his clothes into the machine on top of mine. Likewise, when I stayed at Krystyna's cabin, I noticed that Andrew would often leave unwashed clothes in need of repair on Krystyna's doorstep, in the expectation that she would repair and wash the clothes and return them to him. Here Krystyna's creative skills as a milliner were incorporated into what Andrew assumed was a natural disposition to undertake repairs as part of her marital duties—sewing, like cleaning (see below) was viewed by Andrew as part of femininity.

The notion that women should 'look after' men and boys, extended to Andrew's attitude to housework. Carrier observes that 'members [of households] develop expectations of what they are owed by and what they owe to each other ... however, that to speak of exchange and reciprocation is not necessarily to speak of equality among those involved' (Carrier 1995: 117). Likewise, Andrew told me numerous times that the block house was in disarray because (in spite of the fact that they were legally separated) Krystyna did not come over and clean as often as she should. Even though Jesse had bed-wetting problems because of his Asperger's Syndrome, Andrew was adamant that changing Jesse's bedding in the block house remained Krystyna's responsibility, not his. After walking past Jesse's bedroom to assemble avocado boxes in the adjoining room, the stench of stale urine alerted me to the fact that Jesse's bedding had not been changed for weeks. I then insisted that Andrew should buy soap flakes for washing Jesse's feather duvet, and spent an afternoon with Jesse stripping and washing the sheets and duvets on the bunk beds in his room. Other than commenting on the high price of soap flakes for hand washing a feather duvet, Andrew seemed to think it was normal that I, as a woman, should do this rather than him, suggesting a strong sense of the need for 'female hands' to carry out particular tasks. As Gullestad observes in relation to her work in Norway, shared cultural notions of a female hand suggest that:

A female hand is needed to turn the house into a home; to create a good emotional ambience, to arrange the objects as well as to clean, polish, tend, and keep order ... these abilities and activities are fundamentally a part of femininity (Gullestad 1992: 83).

However, in Andrew's case, it was clear that there was an element of social uncertainty about who should be 'looking after' him, and providing the 'female hand' in the household. Andrew's mate Bryan was a bachelor living on a block near Mildura, and his

bachelor status meant that although his mother and father had retired off the block to live in Mildura, his mother still had responsibility for providing the 'female hand' in the household. Bryan's house was therefore always immaculate, and when I visited with Andrew, he provided us with fresh home-baked apricot slices, which his mother had made from apricots that she had harvested and processed from the block, and left for him to offer to any visitors who happened to be passing. She gained prestige by enabling her son to possess a beautiful house, despite his much-commented upon eligible bachelor status.

In Andrew's house, however, although his mother regularly left pre-prepared meals for him in the freezer to eat when wwoofers were not there, and processed one or two batches of apricots from the block, she let the blame for Andrew's unkempt block house fall on Krystyna. Perhaps with a sense of her own need for independence—possibly after her own years of subordination on the block—Andrew's mother was apparently only willing to carry out fire fighting domestic tasks, such as picking out clothes from Andrew's bedroom floor to launder in advance of their family Christmas trip to Melbourne, safe in the knowledge that news of Andrew's chaotic domestic arrangements would be blamed by others in Mildura on Krystyna rather than herself.

'Looking after' the sexual needs of men in Mildura was regarded as a slightly more ambiguous issue. McIntyre and McIntyre comment on sexual promiscuity in country towns in 1944, by writing:

Sexual promiscuity is, according to reports, very general throughout the country towns, but those who expressed indignation about it were in a minority. These are typical comments: 'There's a good deal of sexual immorality in this town, but where's the town there isn't? There seems to be more here because everybody knows about everything.' 'Most of the marriages here are pretty hasty, but there's no social stigma attached to that.' 'There's a good deal of immorality here, but it's not held against people. If you didn't speak to those you knew behaved badly, you wouldn't have many to speak to.' In many of the small towns the reason given for it was: 'There's nothing else to do'; in view of the dearth of activities in those towns we think it very probable that this cause is effective (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 267).

During fieldwork there was some insinuation by respondents that it was commonplace for men to consider it appropriate for married women to take on a predominantly maternal and housekeeping role (looking after the children, and keeping house) and for men to seek sexual liaisons elsewhere. Prostitutes advertised in the *Sunraysia Daily* and operated freely in Mildura, and I was also told that Mildura had a large bisexual community. Some

people suggested that this meant that women married to bisexual men were exposed to risk of sexually transmitted disease, should their husbands be engaging in unprotected sex. Issues of male sexuality were obliquely referred to in fieldwork and despite the predilection for male-only environments in Mildura, there was, I was told, high levels of homophobia in Mildura. I was told that wearing the wrong sort of shirt or accessories, a 'faggot shirt' or 'poofter glasses' had the capacity to invite a physical assault in any of Mildura's bars (see also Roberts 1993, and Green 1996).

In conclusion, it seemed that women's and men's understanding of what was involved in 'looking after' each other epitomised what appeared to be a marriage contract between unequal partners.

Husbands and Sons 'At The Centre of Things'

Although no strict comparison has been made between fruit-growers and wives it seems that women are less contented than the men. Growers think this is because there is less variety in women's work and because men have more leisure time activities away from home (McIntyre 1948: 148-9).

Changes after marriage were also described to me in terms of simple changes, ranging from no longer sharing decision making when going out in the evening, to an expectation after marriage that women would subordinate their interests to supporting their husband's preferences. Respondents discussed their husbands' assumptions that male activities should be accorded a different status, and for example, I was told that women were expected to remain at home to look after the family, while men pursued their leisure activities. However, men were not expected to reciprocate and support women in their recreational activities. Krystyna told me that after marriage, Andrew's socialising patterns remained the same as in his bachelor days, most notably spending time with his mates rather than with her (see also Ernst 1990, and Dempsey 1992: 265). Other respondents commented that their husbands determined the schedule of the household. In exasperation, one woman told me:

At one stage I used to think God in Heaven, I work 'x' number of days per week, I've got the two kids, and I'm doing the cooking. At one stage I was mowing lawns as well, which is a total pain. But, if the husband was going out to meeting or going to play sport, you had everything ready for him, and if you were going to play sport, you had everything ready for them [the husband and family] for when you went away, if you understand what I mean, which is pretty unfair to put it like that now, and I think those kind of attitudes are balancing out a bit.

During interview and in conversation, respondents also told me that it was more trouble than it was worth attempting to go out or go away for weekends if their husbands did not approve, as men had a tendency to consciously, or unconsciously, employ spoiling tactics. One woman said that she was reluctant to plan to go away for weekends because if her husband had advance notice of her plans, he would invite his friends to the house for a weekend drinking session. She said the time it took to clear up, and the economic problems of budgeting to replace the food consumed by the men, took away any joy from the excursion. I noticed that even though I was only a wwoofer, Andrew discouraged, or said it would not be possible under the wwoof arrangements, for me to attend certain activities if they interrupted his routine. For example, Andrew said it was not possible for me to attend a wine appreciation course as it would conflict with avocado packing on Sundays, but when he wanted to do something which conflicted with the scheduled time for packing, he simply moved the packing a day forward and insisted we packed on the Saturday. Likewise, if I planned ahead and cooked double quantities of food to ensure the meal could be spread over two days (which would mean that I go out and be able to eat healthy meals), late at night, Andrew invariably transferred the surplus portions to the freezer to store up as 'good food' to eat when wwoofers or his mother would not be cooking for him.

When discussing change within the household and wider community in Smalltown, Dempsey comments: 'while some of the younger women said things were starting to change, a greater number of them were claiming that men were only *talking* about equality' (Dempsey 1992: 102). In the same way in Mildura, there was considerable ambiguity in interview and conversation about the extent to which men were, and were not, changing their behaviour within marriages. There was often talk about men taking on a fairer share of household tasks, notably cooking and ironing, but spoken narratives about this work did not always relate to reality. For example, when I asked a woman during interview about her husband's contribution to childcare, I said that I had been told that her husband had a reputation as a man who was very involved in domestic tasks and childcare. She was very surprised by this, and laughed out loud, before telling me:

No, no, no, but it's great they think he's doing such a good job, at least it shows he's trying. He's active, but only for a little while. He takes an active role, but if he's tired, he's tired, and he's the first in bed in each night. If there is someone else to do it, he will leave it to someone else. If he's told to do it he will, if I tell him he has to do it, he will do it, but it's not often that he'll take the initiative. He won't think about giving the boys a bath. He plays cricket and chess, but not the necessary things ... like this morning, he's usually first up. I was late up this morning, and said can you get the boys

sandwiches ready for school—I really don't ask often—and it would have been nice if I didn't have to ask, if it was all ready. The initiative is just not there ... but then again, he is 50 and was brought up by a mother who did everything [for him] and there were only boys in his family and he was pretty well coddled.

It appeared that in Mildura, as in Dempsey's Smalltown:

When they do help, older husbands like younger husbands select the less demanding tasks and leave their wives with the more repetitious jobs, which exercise the greatest constraints on the performer's freedom to come and go as the please, and on their leisure activity (Dempsey 1992: 105).

However, in contrast to women's comments to me that they would prefer their husbands to take more responsibility in the home, it was noticeable that limited expectations of men's capabilities in the domestic realm, were regularly rehearsed and reinforced by women in the public sphere. For example, at the International Women's Day dinner I attended in Mildura, within minutes of arrival the conversation at my table had turned to the domestic arrangements that had been made by the women around the table for their husbands' and boyfriends' evening meals. A woman in her early twenties told the table that her boyfriend had to go round to a friend's house to barbecue a steak in her absence, and most of the other women then responded with tales of their husbands' culinary ineptitude. The young woman then moved on to problems with ironing, and said it was 'okay' for her to iron her boyfriend's cricket whites, but when she had ironed his football vest she had been in 'real trouble' and her boyfriend 'had to wrinkle it all up again!' I commented that several of my male friends were much better cooks than I was, and the woman sitting beside me added tartly that she had made sure that all of her sons could cook for themselves before they left home. The conversation lulled, and then one of the women on the other side of the table told us that she was expected to pack her brother's sports kit when she was a young girl, until, one day she painted 'I love boys' in pink nail varnish on his jockstrap, after which he thoroughly checked his own kit before leaving the house. After a moment's silence the conversation moved on to more neutral ground, but at the end of the dinner I and the two other women I have mentioned, were the only women who had attempted to move the conversation away from men's domestic failings. I later talked to the other two women, who both told me that change had to start with mothers, and that they were trying to encourage that type of change in their own homes.

Food Preparation

In personal narratives and in conversation, food preparation was often the idiom used to refer to inequalities and tensions within marriage. Personal narratives relating to food preparation were also used as allegories of male authority within the marital relationship.

Narratives recounted to me by other women chimed with my experience of food preparation on the block, as when I arrived on Andrew's block he said that we should share the cooking and cook on alternate nights, something which he repeated when each new wwoofer arrived. However, I took over cooking on my fourth day on the block, after Andrew had produced 'minestrone soup pizza' (a tin of minestrone soup cooked on a pizza base with grated cheese), and tinned soup with two-minute-noodles when it was his turn to cook. Later, when one of Krystyna's daughters visited from Melbourne she asked me to provide her with a step-by-step account of how Andrew had managed to cook these 'meals,' as she could not believe that he had successfully produced two meals.

However, more significantly, commentary and quotidian oratory around food preparation was used as a means by which Andrew could project 'hard words' (Weiner 1991) against subordinate women, illuminating some of the tensions in his estranged marriage. For example, one evening towards the end of my time on the block, Krystyna happened to visit during dinner. She came into the block house kitchen as Andrew was poking a perfect moussaka around his plate with a fork asking me if the aubergine was cooked properly, saying it tasted like leather, and suggesting that I put peanut butter through the moussaka, to make it taste more like a spicy peanut sauce I had previously made. I ignored Andrew, and told him to leave the aubergine and eat the sauce if he did not like the aubergine, but Krystyna was incensed and telephoned Andrew later that evening to berate him for criticising my cooking. However, she later told me her annoyance was prompted by her remembrance of Andrew's criticism of her cooking and his unfavourable comparisons with his mother, which related both to Krystyna's cooking and to her ability to cook on a limited budget. This was a complete surprise to me as Andrew had been praising Krystyna's cooking to me and the other wwoofers almost every day, and told us regularly how much he missed 'family mealtimes.'

The issue of male authority mediated through the dynamics of family mealtimes resonated not only in Andrew's kitchen but also in a broader context, and at all of the rural women's gatherings I attended, women discussed the problem of the 'the burnt chop

syndrome' affecting rural women. The burnt chop syndrome was used as an epithet for the allegedly common phenomenon of women putting themselves last in order of importance in the family, for example by eating the burnt chop or the smallest remaining portion at mealtimes. Due to my fieldwork experiences of tensions over food and cooking, I attended a workshop at the New South Wales Rural Women's Gathering on family meal times. The workshop leader focused on presenting tasty and varied meals 'for the children,' and suggested that this would encourage the children to sit around the table and eat as a family, rather than asking if they could sit in front of the television and eat dinner. After some discussion of how to encourage children to sit at a table to eat, I suggested that if the father sat at the table to eat dinner, and that was presented to the children as 'how it was going to be,' it was more likely that the children would sit at the table.

It then emerged that the workshop was being run on the assumption that the male farmer or blocky would eat his dinner in front of the television, at a different time to the women and children. I then contributed my experience to the workshop, and said that when I first cooked at Andrew's place he suggested we ate in front of the television. I explained how I had told Andrew that if I cooked then whoever was eating would sit at the table and communicate over the food rather than watch television; and if he cooked then he could sit wherever he wanted, but I would sit at the table. The workshop members listened as I described how Andrew always sat at the table to eat throughout my time at the block. The first time Krystyna happened to visit the block at dinner time she was stunned to find Andrew sitting at the table, and told me that in ten years of married life on the block he had only ever sat at the table under extreme protest, and generally insisted on eating his dinner sitting in front of the television.

The women at the workshop responded by saying that the only reason Andrew sat at the table was because we were not married, and I was a relatively young and potential sexually available woman. They went on to insist that if we had been married, he would be in front of the television at mealtimes. Another woman then spoke up and exclaimed that the women should throw their televisions out of the house (as she had done in order to save her marriage) and force their husbands to sit at the table and talk to them. However, in a very rare moment of hostility at the gatherings, the other women turned on her and one of them said 'if we threw out the television the husband would go too.' The workshop leader then attempted to conciliate by suggesting that the women should attempt to persuade their husbands to eat at the table once a week, which some of the women agreed to try.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on some aspects of marital relationships on the block. I have explored the paradox between women's expressions of optimism about courting and the prospects of finding a 'good match' for themselves in Mildura and their awareness of gender inequality in marriage in general on the blocks and in the town. The metaphor of falling in love was discussed as providing what Linde (1993) describes as 'adequate causality' and a denial of personal agency in the life story or personal narrative. The meanings of gift exchange, and the assembling of household utensils and furnishings prior to marriage to a Mildura blocky were discussed within the context of the blockies' reported disinterest in any change in their home and household arrangements after marriage, and the general expectation in Mildura that a 'blocky's missus' should 'look after' her husband. Broader issues of inequality were interpreted and discussed through analysis of personal narratives and fieldwork events relating to gender division in quotidian domestic tasks.

The many ambiguities which women expressed in Mildura in relation to marriage and family life were perhaps best exemplified at the end of fieldwork. As I said my farewells in Mildura, several of the women asked me to come back and visit with the husband and children that they expected me to acquire in my thirties. Perhaps more significantly, however, several other women drew me aside, and told me to seize the opportunities that were open to my generation and 'do something' with my life, something which did not involve getting married and having children.

CHAPTER SIX

'WHERE THE RUBBER HITS THE ROAD' IN A BLOCK MARRIAGE: WOMEN'S WORK

This chapter discusses women's personal narratives of work as the most socially acceptable way for women in Mildura to articulate their dissatisfaction with gender inequality in their marriages. Whilst capacity for hard work was a source of pride and identity as rural women, respondents were frustrated about the absence of private or public recognition of their labour within the block house and on the land. Krystyna and some other women in Mildura liked the expression 'where the rubber hits the road' (which I understood was originally an American phrase). They used it to describe a moment of seriousness when issues became clear, when hard work is started, or when life is directed by new purpose brought about by challenging events. In the same way, they described work to me as the matter of contention which finally dispelled romantic illusions within the marital relationship, and which encouraged women to evaluate their personal circumstances. Paradoxically, however, work was also a source of confidence and self esteem for individual women.

This chapter considers women's perspectives on work as something that established relationships, and the concomitant tensions arising when men defined women's work as 'favours' owed to their husbands, or servitude⁴⁸ incorporated within men's marital rights. Women described block work as particularly emblematic of their broader predicament in Mildura, and in interview respondents suggested that they were apprenticed to accept oppressive work patterns on the block. This chapter discusses how resistance to these arrangements was transformed by male oratory to describe the women as not being able to 'cope,' thus undermining their self-identity as rural women; and how women's creative and socially productive work was recast by men as drudgery or servitude. The ambiguities between men's stated expectation that they should be 'looked after' and male oratorical statements of 'provision' for the family are explored, as is the subterfuge of husbands (and their mothers) in concealing family resources from their wives. Through ethnographic examples, the way in which 'money acts as an incredibly powerful agent of profound social

⁴⁸ Marilyn Wearing (see over) discusses the importance of distinguishing between work, leisure, and servitude. Her argument is that if women's work is not identified as work, it should be categorised as leisure, and as unpaid household or domestic work is clearly not leisure, she insists that it should be recognised as servitude.

and cultural transformations' (Bloch and Parry 1989: 3) in Mildura is also considered, as are some of the 'range of cultural meanings which surround monetary transactions' (ibid.: 1) within the context of a disintegrating marriage in Mildura. Craft work is briefly explored as a socially acceptable means (in Mildura) by which women were able to seek financial independence and self-expression.

Block Women and Rural Work

In Australia, the amount of officially recognised work women carry out in primary industries, notably agriculture and horticulture, has been the subject of debate for some time. In 1947, Holt commented that 'the amount of farm work which has fallen to the lot of women during the war is considerable. *No accurate measurement could be taken during the survey*' (Holt 1947: 163 emphasis added). Since then Leipens (1996) and others—for example, James (1989), Franklin et al. (1994), Alston (1995a and 1995b)—have noted that farm women's work is only recognised during times of crisis. Marilyn Wearing, the prominent New Zealand politician and women's rights activist, has also commented that:

In Australia, the official number of women directly employed in agriculture has doubled in the past 30 years to one-third of the rural workforce. What this really means, of course, is that women are now being paid, or at least acknowledged as book entries. At the same time as the rural population has declined, the proportion of women involved in farming is said to have increased. These figures more than likely reflect a category transition, for half the farming women in Australia still describe the work they do as 'home duties' (Wearing 1996: 66).

At the time of my fieldwork Marilyn Wearing highlighted the importance of recognising women's work through a series of public appearances during which she commented on the lack of recognition of women's work in transforming dung into fuel and a traditional material for building in the developing world.⁴⁹ Although few of my respondents were

⁴⁹ Wearing's commentary reflected her written observations that 'making dung cakes to be used as fuel appears to me to be an entire manufacturing process, with clear inputs and outputs of an economic nature. In mining or gas extraction, for example, paid workers harvest the primary resource. Machines transport it to processing plants. The raw material is refined, the product manufactured. It is sold, then consumed. The traditional market model is followed: workers process raw materials for the market. This counts. But when dung, the 'non-product,' is carried as a 'service' by 'housewives,' to sustain land, dwellings and households, then, according to the economic model, nothing happens. There is no economic activity. *But dung work is only women's work, so it is a safe assumption that in the official definitions of productive work it will be invisible*' (Wearing 1996: 46 emphasis added).

aware of her writing on this issue (Wearing 1988, 1996) many heard her speak on The Future of Farming Communities Radio Forum⁵⁰ and her words resonated with their experiences (see also Chapter One).

It is significant that the problem of the lack of recognition of women's work in primary industries has been recognised in Australia at a political and policy level. At the time of my fieldwork research was being commissioned by the Australian federal government which sought to quantify women's work on farms, and this research was subsequently published in a landmark report (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry 1999). This report quantified the findings of Leipens' research which contested recent literature based on a 'theory of gendered division of labour where women do little physical work; [and] the indoor work they complete is service oriented and subservient to men as the primary decision makers in the farm' (Leipens 1996: 212).

Rather than quantifying rural women's work, however, this chapter would aim to explore how women understood and represented their work on the land, and how work on the block was negotiated within their marriages. Therefore instead of discussing work as 'productive,' 'informal,' or 'subsistence' work, or women 'engaged in personal or domestic services' (Wearing 1996: 52), I aim to understand how work was understood as 'to be doing all of the above, and often all of them at the same time' (ibid.: 52), and how work was made meaningful by the women on the blocks.

The women I met in Mildura who had (often at different times in their lives) worked on the blocks or who were married to blockies, understood their work on the land as distinctly 'rural work'; as work that established and sustained relationships; and as something which was a source of pride. The paradox that women regarded work as something which was indicative of servitude in their marriage, but *also* as something which demonstrated their skills and abilities was clearly apparent. It is illuminating that through conducting comparable life history work with women farming in Germany, Inhetveen has commented that 'only in the light of such work histories will we begin to understand many paradoxes, for example women's reference to the biblical saying: 'If life has been a delight, it has been toil and trouble'' (Inhetveen 1990: 106). Likewise O'Rourke and Batsleer have commented on the importance of understanding women's pride in their work, in a working class context in the North of England. I would suggest that this contributes to an

⁵⁰ *The Future of Farm Communities Forum*, ABC Regional Radio (Victoria), Warragul: 10th April 1997.

understanding of the pride in their work expressed by the women I met in Mildura.

O'Rourke and Batsleer write:

'Pride in work' was both a pride in participation in industrial success and a pride in the skill involved in the work itself. When we are 'working-class and proud of it,' these are the sources of pride we need to explore and understand ... Understanding the experience of working-class women in the industrial North means understanding the significance and meaning of work in their lives and relating these understandings to a whole history of subjectivities. It means recognising that, while there is nothing special in each woman's experience of work there is something very particular (O'Rourke and Batsleer 1987: 44).

This pride, and the physicality of work on the land, was something repeatedly referred to by my respondents as a kind of embodied knowledge and emotion, similarly described by Inhetveen in her German Study:

Women's work was, and still remains today, manual labour, or more precisely physical labour ... This creates a special form of repetition: it is always the same and never the same as women say. This seems to contribute to a special imprinting of work: these memories have been stored by the whole body, not only by the brain. Precisely because it was often hard labour, experience of it is retained in the body as a skill, an injury, or a trauma. Success and pride, pain and suffering experienced through work are remembered in great detail. Owing to an affinity to nature, rural women's work is associated with strong sensuous experiences that come to life in biographical episodes. Sounds, smells, pictures, sensations that accompanied repetitive hard work, seem to be as vivid in the memories of the women as they were at the time. The excellent capacity for remembering work activities seems to be the product of body memory in the complete sense of the word (Inhetveen 1990: 195).

Likewise, in her description of women's farm work in Normandy, Okely (1996) notes that Madame Grégoire's pride and pleasure in her productive labour showed that creative autonomy can be sought within circumstances of subordination, but reminds us that 'women's productive yet different participation in a gender division of labour is not evidence of equality' (Okely 1996: 229).

To the women I met, the creative and socially productive aspects of work were particularly important as a means of building relationships. Inhetveen observes that in her study:

Even when reporting agricultural work or technical matters, for instance the construction of the first water pipes in the village, they tended to make it into a story about relationships (Inhetveen 1990: 111).

Likewise in Mildura, women interpreted their work as an activity which created relationships, and asserted that their work should be recognised as socially as well as economically productive. However, as discussed below, men classified women's work as 'labour' and 'favours' in the same way that Arendt categorised labour by asserting that 'the mark of all labouring that *it leaves nothing behind*, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent' (Arendt 1958: 87 emphasis added). Following Comaroff and Comaroff, I would argue that for the women I met, 'work contrasts with labor as does self-construction with self-destruction' (1992: 156), and that a recurring motif of the Mildura Stories related to women's perception of their work as 'social creativity' (ibid.: 164), as 'the positive aspect of human activity ... expressed in the making of self and others in the course of everyday life' (ibid.: 163). This understanding and representation of work conflicted with their husband's demotion of their work.

Women's Work in Personal Narratives

My respondents emphasised that women carrying out 'men's work' on farms and blocks extended historically back as far as settlement in the region, but some said the men 'didn't like to let on' about this. My respondents ability to manage a home, family life, and often combining paid work and block labour, was a source of pride for the women I met, and such challenges (when accepted as an inherent part of 'country life') were not viewed as problematic. However, lack of recognition for their work and involvement in the block business by their husbands and members of their husband's families was something that rankled across the generations of women I met.

Respondents suggested that due to the isolation of Mildura, and what some felt were the 'traditional' attitudes of many of the blockies, women on blocks were simply considered to be wives and 'housewives' rather than farmers or blockies in their own right, or even partners in the block business. Some women suggested that the situation may be different elsewhere in Victoria or Australia, but were not hopeful of changing the attitudes of the male blockies in Mildura.

I asked women if they had always accepted 'the way things are' on the block, and discussions of work on the blocks often led to personal narratives about women's work, in which a normal day of work would comprise of a full day's work outside followed by housework through the evening. One woman commented that when her children were young it was not unusual for her to be awake at 5.30a.m. to do chores before the children

woke up, drive tractors all day, and to be washing floors and cleaning at 10p.m., a schedule which at the time she thought of as normal. The phrase 'it was all part of life' was often used by the women I met to describe a lifestyle intrinsically linked with work rather than leisure. For example, one woman who had grown up on a dryland farm and married a blocky in the hope of a more metropolitan life said:

It just come automatic, I just did it. From when I was a child to when my husband died. Probably growing up that way prepares you. That's probably so. You didn't know another life. If you [Gill] had grown up there, you would have had inkling to get out and do the same thing. To me it was just part of life.

As discussed above, in this way, the sense of being 'apprenticed,' in de Beauvoir's terms (Okely 1975) to rural work patterns, and subordination to the established gendered division of labour, was transformed by women to represent a positive quality which could be attributed to 'rural women,' who 'got on with what had to be done' (see Chapter Three). O'Rourke and Batsleer also described such narratives and their significance to individuals as 'stories addressed to the unequal task of making sense of misery. 'I just did what had to be done' (O'Rourke and Batsleer 1987: 44). These kinds of observations also mirror Armitage's observations from life story interviews with Colorado 'Frontier' women. She quotes from her interviews: 'As one respondent explained, mixing her apples, oranges and infants: 'It was just something you did and you didn't think about the time (it took). You just did it along with everything else ... and raised a big garden'(Armitage 1979: 471).

Likewise, when discussing her research with working class women involved in a union drive in the southern United States, Sachs observes that:

The women did not describe their jobs as lists of particular tasks, although that is the way their job descriptions read. Instead they stressed the unity of planning a day, a week, a life. That was work: some of it was "public work"—that is, it paid a wage; some of it was unwaged. It included a large number of manual tasks, but *its real heart and soul was being able to take responsibility and initiative for knowing what needed to be done, and knowing how to do it. A woman had to have manual, mental and organizational skills to be an adult* (Sachs 1989: 89 emphasis added).

Similarly, in Mildura the ability to know 'what needed to be done' on the block and for the well-being of the family, and how to do it 'all at the same time,' was represented as a particular quality of physically skilled and culturally competent rural women. It was interesting, however, that an article about the 'myths of motherhood' published in the Melbourne Age (Maushart 1997) while I was interviewing drew comment from several

respondents. One woman described how it had made her reflect on her work experiences on the block, and on how she had 'coped.' She said to me:

Did you read the article on Saturday about women faking it? I looked at that and thought I must have been crazy—I'd teach all day, take kids to sport, and during harvest I would help box fruit at night. There was no one else to do it. The pickers came from Greece, Italy, Spain and had no English and they would get up at the crack of dawn and pick through the heat of the day, and then at night physically shake the racks off. And then it was boxed up manually. It was really physically demanding, and I used to do a bit of picking—and I still do spreading. All the family pitched in though, and I was doing this on top of a teaching load, at a weekend, and up to all hours during the week, lugging fruit, and you wonder why you end up with a bad back? I was probably doing three jobs at one time, and from that point of view it has changed, and *at least the girls today can say that they're doing three jobs*. I had never thought about until I read that article, and thought you [Gill] were coming this week. Maybe I did think about it at the time, but fruit was there and had to be boxed. That was it. Make hay while the sun shines. You just did it. You didn't think about it. You just did it. When the children were home they did it too. Like any farmers wife you just do it. It's part of the lifestyle I accepted.

Some women recalled that there were particular moments on the block when they decided they had 'had enough,' and whilst some described struggling on, others said that they had the ability to 'draw the line.' One woman told me that she literally drew the line to control the size of the chicken shed they had on their property. Her husband had been expanding the egg business which relied on her labour, and she told me:

I already had four kids, and I said if that chook house gets any longer I stop there, and you will do the rest—sure enough it didn't get any longer. I stepped back then, and then I stepped back again just recently. I love reading. I didn't read for 30 years because I was just too busy and too exhausted.⁵¹ It was a tough decision to pull back, but now I want to do something for me. The farm is not going to be here forever, and neither am I.

I was told that particular tensions arose between husbands and wives through the constant expectation that women would be able to 'cope' with block work on top of all their other commitments and responsibilities as wives and mothers. However, respondents told me that there were dangers for women in suggesting they had 'too much to do,' as I was told that husbands would suggest that the women were simply not 'coping' rather than adjusting domestic arrangements. For example, when Krystyna challenged the work

⁵¹ The sense of the unchanging nature of domestic arrangements in Mildura is illustrated by contrasting views expressed in this interview with Holt's record of a 'homemaker's' opinions on this issue in the 1940s. He wrote: 'the remark, "we haven't got time to read much," was on most homemakers' lips; however, one woman said she propped up a book wherever she could reasonably do so while doing her work' (Holt 1947: 105).

arrangements on the block, Andrew simply turned her resistance around, and regularly told me and others that she had 'not been able to cope' with the life on the land (despite the contrary physical evidence of her work, such as the orchard, on the block). Likewise Andrew told me that Krystyna was 'not coping' as a mother, rather than *not conforming* to his preferred domestic arrangements and dealing with a very difficult child with a mental disability. The *common sense* social constructions of the Anglo-Celtic blocky and the dominant male discourse in Mildura relating to work on the blocks—'all of which show men as the most likely speakers/authorities and constructors of agricultural truths' (Leipens 1996: 92)—reinforced, and amplified Andrew's quotidian oratory on this issue.

However, when I spoke to Krystyna about living on the block, she described her time on the block with a mixture of pride at what had been achieved, and regret about the 'lost years' of her own life. The block was in decline when Krystyna married Andrew, and Krystyna told me that Andrew had been struggling to 'keep up' with the management of the land. Krystyna said that she carried on with her full time social work job (at that time working in the first women's refuge in Mildura) but also worked on the block, often driving the tractor for long hours after work. Krystyna also said that because commitment to the block was her family priority at that time—and since she thought she was building a relationship, and a future, with Andrew on the block through her labour and her daughter's labour—her daughters found it easy to persuade her that the essential block work was a good reason for them to stay away from school during the busy times of the year to work on the block.

After Jesse was born, Krystyna found that having sole responsibility for caring for Jesse (who Krystyna and other respondents described as having difficult behaviour from birth), working full time off the block and working on the block, was too personally challenging, and she resigned from her paid employment in order to live and work on the block full time. At that time, despite strong opposition from her mother-in-law, Krystyna persuaded Andrew to convert to organic production. It was a fortuitous move for Andrew, as in later years the organic premium carried Andrew through lean times, and his labour costs were reduced through the 'work-for-keep' labour provided by wwoofers. Krystyna told me that after they converted to predominantly organic production, she put all of her energies into the business, and in her spare leisure time established a vegetable garden, planted an orchard, and kept chickens. During harvest time, Krystyna then introduced changes to Andrew's authoritarian style of dealing with pickers, and joined the wwoof scheme to bring young workers to the block on a year-round basis. Throughout this time, however, despite her day-to-day involvement in block work and block management, she

told me that she was never allowed to see the accounts. Andrew's mother dealt with all of the finances, and Krystyna managed the domestic expenses on a weekly allowance paid to her by Andrew. Krystyna told me that she once proposed a change in the way the block was managed by suggesting they developed a business plan, and even went as far as inviting a farm business adviser to the property. However, according to Krystyna, Andrew was furious that she had involved an 'outsider' in the family business, and he ordered the adviser off the property.

Throughout this time, Krystyna regarded this work as 'self-construction' (Comaroff 1992: 156) as a 'blocky's missus,' and as an organic farmer in her own right. For a short time she changed her name to Krystyna Jones, and often spoke about her enjoyment of the creativity of her life on the block. However, although Krystyna regarded this work as work which was building relationships rather than labour, she gradually realised (after incidents such as Andrew's encounter with the farm business adviser), that Andrew simply regarded her work as 'labour'—what women did when they were married to a blocky. Eventually Krystyna realised that Andrew's view was that the block belonged solely to him and his mother, and that Krystyna's and her teenage daughters' work was labour which was simply incorporated into that ownership.

When I worked on Andrew's block, although we all worked hard the assumption of male authority, and women's position as labourers was always explicit. For example, one day after harvesting an early crop of sultanas, Clary, Andrew and I had to load the buckets of grapes on to a trailer pulled by the 'ute' (utility vehicle), before driving the load round to the drying racks to spread the fruit out to dry. It had been a long day of picking in high temperatures, and Andrew jumped into the ute and drove slowly between the vines as Clary and I loaded the heavy buckets on to the trailer. Clary was toiling in the heat, and as the grapes stacked up on the trailer I was finding it increasingly difficult to lift the buckets up over shoulder height on to the trailer. Meanwhile, Andrew was in the ute cab listening to the local radio station. We finished the first load, drove round to the racks, spread the grapes to dry, and then drove back to the vines to collect a second trailer load. As we were driving back to the vines I said to Andrew 'it's ridiculous for you to be in the cab and me lifting buckets when you're much stronger than I am, so I'll drive the ute this time.' Clary stared at me in amazement, and I then got into the cab and started to drive the ute between the vines. After a moment of hesitation, Andrew began to load the buckets, regularly shouting instructions about what the speed the ute—crawling along in first gear—should be driven at. Afterwards Clary told me that I had better not do that again, as no one apart from Andrew was allowed to drive the ute. Later, Krystyna said

she was astonished that Andrew had picked up the grapes, as during harvest time driving the ute or tractor was the high status job, and the male blockies generally drove the utes or tractors between the vines while the pickers lifted the buckets on to the trailer. Krystyna said she and her daughters had never been allowed to drive the ute at harvest time, although they were expected to drive the tractors to carry out tractor work amongst the vines at busy times of year.

My experiences, and those of my respondents, supported Leipens' assertion (above) that women were engaged in physical work on the farms, but since 'labour' that does not produce profits is not considered production (Wearing 1988), and women's contribution was incorporated into the work of men, women in Mildura were not considered to be working. Indeed when Andrew's mother asked him about Krystyna and her daughter's contribution to the block, he always maintained that they had *never worked* on the block (see Chapter Seven).

Work or 'Favours'

When considering the value of women's work, I was told by my respondents that men's interpretation of women's work (which I argue was viewed by men as low value labour rather than creative work), always left women in a state of indebtedness to their husbands. When I worked on Andrew's block, and subsequently in Krystyna's business, I found that whilst Krystyna and I would talk about various activities as straightforward 'work,' Andrew spoke about 'granting' and 'reclaiming favours'; and it was Andrew's view that Krystyna owed him a series of 'favours' based on an exchange relationship that *he* defined. In his work on gift and commodity exchange, Carrier comments on the petty dealing of stolen goods in London's East End in a similar way. He writes:

Here, transactions are not impersonal exchanges of material equivalents. Instead, according to Gerald Mars, the giving of a thing is frequently seen as a "favor", one that "has to be repaid, but only when the opportunity arises and only with whatever comes to hand. And '*whatever is at hand*' may not be material at all." These transactions, then, entail diffuse, open-ended personal obligations of the sort that characterize home and social relations, with the consequence that the "goods that ... [are] given have been dematerialized and *the transaction has been personalized*" (Mars 1982: 173; see also Henry, S. 1976) (Carrier 1995: 193 emphasis added).

While I was staying with Krystyna, it seemed that Andrew managed to personalise all transactions between themselves, and skilfully manipulated the exchange of 'favours' to

his advantage. For example, after Andrew's neighbour Pete visited the block, ostensibly to collect lemons (see Chapter Five) I told Krystyna that the ground was covered with windfall lemons, and the orchard was producing fruit crops which Andrew was not harvesting. However, she refused to come round to take any fruit for herself and Jesse, as she said that Andrew would say that this meant she owed him 'favours.' Andrew also used manipulative oratory to assert his authority over Krystyna, and visiting wwoofers, by insinuating about what might happen to those who 'took fruit from the block' without permission by repeating the story of when his grandfather had shot a man who had been caught stealing grapes from the block during the depression era of the 1930s (see also Chapter Seven).

On another occasion Krystyna, who was always 'hoping for the best' in her relationship with Andrew, made him an elaborate horseradish sauce. Maschio observes that 'An important dimension of 'the spirit of the gift' is contained in the gift's embodiment of the relationship between the cultural and personal memory' (Maschio 1998: 97), and in this case, Krystyna was concerned about the fact that Andrew had a flesh wound on his leg that had not healed. Using her excellent culinary skills, awareness of appropriate home remedies, and the knowledge that the horseradish sauce was Andrew's favourite, she prepared the sauce, and delivered it to Andrew at the block. Krystyna said to him she was taking windfall limes (from the orchard she had planted) in exchange, and returned to her cabin with a small bag of limes, which she knew were of considerably less value than the cost involved in making the jar of sauce.

Two days later Andrew telephoned Krystyna and said that she could have some avocados from the block. Krystyna, still 'hoping for the best,' suggested to me that this could herald a new era of rapprochement—the gift being inalienably linked to the giver and therefore 'important for regenerating the relationship between giver and recipient' (Carrier 1995: 24). She hurried round to the block but, on arrival she found that Andrew was offering her hard (unripe) and sunburned avocados, unsuitable for sale, which had been rejected from the packing that had been done the previous week. However, he told her that as the avocados had 'cash value' if she took them then he would expect unspecified favours from her in the future.

These exchanges illustrated the asymmetry in the relationship between Andrew and Krystyna, as Krystyna attempted to carry out an exchange of 'gifts,' whereas Andrew still regarded her gifts as items for incorporation into the 'labour' she 'owed' to him as her husband. As Carrier suggests:

These transactions are economic in that they are an important source of the material objects and money that the transactors need. However, transactors do not act in ways that reflect the logic of the world of work. They do not seek maximum economic advantage, and in fact *"money is only a part, and rarely the most important part" of these deals* (Mars 1982: 171) (Carrier 1995: 193 emphasis added).

When I was working with Andrew, even though Krystyna and Andrew were legally separated—in the same way that Andrew was unhappy about Krystyna's refusal to clean the block house (see Chapter Five)—he grumbled to me that Krystyna did not come over to the block to help pack the avocados, or help with packing the grapes when we were harvesting table grapes, even though she would not be paid for either task. Andrew justified his point of view to me, by telling me that Krystyna always owed him 'favours' in return for what he argued was the exorbitant child maintenance he paid for Jesse (A\$79 per month). However, on this issue, Krystyna told me that as part of her separation settlement she had taken Andrew's sedan car to replace the car she brought to the marriage, and had at first been paid A\$200 per month child maintenance. She said that Andrew found himself driving around Mildura in a ute, and resented paying that level of child maintenance. Therefore in the middle of 1996 he bought a new sedan to replace the car Krystyna had taken, and thus allegedly reduced his assets by A\$35,000, and his concomitant liability for child maintenance payments to A\$79 per month. Andrew also complained to me that Krystyna's daughter had 'stolen' petrol from him by charging petrol to his account, whereas Krystyna said it been agreed that she and her daughters were entitled to this petrol for use when driving Jesse to and from school, and for activities in Mildura. Thus cars, avocados, lemons, limes, petrol and sauce became exchange objects which were 'carriers of emotionally-charged memory' (Maschio 1998: 96).

Similarly with wwoofing, the balance of 'favours' was always deemed by Andrew to be to his advantage. Initially Andrew paid for lunches and dinner whenever we were off the block, and paid for my entrance for a trip to the speedway track. As paying for long-term wwoofers off-block food and for some entertainment is standard practice for wwoof hosts, I did not think this was anything out of the ordinary. However, as I became friendlier with Krystyna and maintained a strictly platonic relationship with Andrew the situation changed. On one occasion, after working a twelve hour day on a Saturday in temperatures of more than thirty degrees Celsius picking cash crops of grapes and avocados with Andrew and Tobias (another wwoofer), Andrew announced he was taking us to the speedway track on Sunday evening. However, it was not until we arrived at the track that we found that he expected us to pay for our own entrance fee. Likewise the following

week, when Andrew suggested we go out to the Workingman's Club for our evening meal after several days of us working very long hours, it transpired that Andrew was attending a bowling club dinner that evening, and he left Tobias and I standing outside the Workingman's Club on the pavement, expected to pay for our own food. Over dinner, Tobias and I agreed that this was not good wwoofer management, as our volunteer work had saved Andrew from hundreds of dollars in labour costs for the harvest of the first cash crops of the season. In my view, Andrew regarded wwoofers' work as 'labour' rather than work that should be rewarded. In the same way, according to Krystyna's friends, when Andrew realised that he was not going to be in a position to claim any sexual 'favours' from me in return for treats, he saw no reason to curry favour with me. With nothing to gain from treating his wwoofers, Andrew simply chose to amplify his role as supervisor.

Women told me that whilst women owed men 'favours,' men rarely owed favours to women. This was illustrated when I packed up to leave Andrew's place to go Krystyna's for harvest and bought some cardboard boxes used for packing oranges from Andrew. They cost A\$1.70 each and I used nine, the cost of which totalled A\$15.30. I had A\$15.25 in small bills and change, and left that on the kitchen table. When Andrew came in from the block he immediately checked the amount and as he did so, I said 'it's five cents short but I don't have the change,' to which he insisted that he might have the change, and then said I could give him an IOU. At first I thought he was joking, but then wrote out an IOU for five cents, which he accepted and then announced that 'that was the price I gave you, and that is the price you should pay. It's five cents now, but it might be 20 cents next time, and it all builds up.' To me this seemed strange as Andrew had not given me money to compensate me for stickers I had given to him and 'given him a price for,' one day when we were packing grapes. Nor had he acknowledged the preserves and miscellaneous food items that I had shared with him and Jesse, I thought, as part of normal social life. In these ways Andrew as a man, and as the blocky and supervisor, determined when we were sharing and when our transactions were part of an exchange. Wwoofing, like a Mildura marriage, appeared to be a contract between unequal partners.

Decision making and women's involvement in decision making

In interview, and during conversation, women discussed problems surrounding a 'woman's place' within the block business and relating to decision making on the block. The possibility of women changing attitudes, or introducing new ideas to the block was viewed as virtually impossible by the majority of respondents, and several women commented

that women's suggestions for business improvement (as with Krystyna's efforts above) were often ignored. One woman told me how her initial attempts to contribute to the block business had been dismissed, and thus despite working full time on the block she felt that she had lost interest. She said:

Well my husband makes the decisions basically. I've really lost interest in the farm as a business because he makes the decisions. I had some bright ideas, or so I thought, maybe for the first twenty years, but he made the decisions anyway because he'd been here all his life—His dad came out and helped him, and they shared. It was a joint ownership of the farm, and I wasn't in that. So really from the start I didn't have a say, and I lost interest really. Because what's the use of having bright ideas if no one is going to take any notice of you?

Another respondent told me that all of her ideas had been dismissed one by one, and that she had recognised early on that in her marriage her views would not be taken seriously by her husband. As an example, she told me:

I remember we were out on the racks one day, and we had to dip all the fruit manually in the dip tank with a crane. Our frame took seventy five buckets, and you'd wind it all in and out. One day I said 'there has to be a better way to do this.' I said you should be able to spray it on the racks. My husband and his father said 'ha ha ha.' Then blow me down someone came up with a spraying wand for racks. I never forgot that.

In addition, others commented that it would be difficult to encourage men to accept that women had 'views' and an interest in greater involvement in the block business. For example, one woman said:

The women on the blocks, even the younger women, are just seen as workers. And they work very very hard, and [yet] their opinions are not valued. Beyond mothering and maybe on the type of grapes planted. They are squashed. The men rule the roost. They [the blockies] expect breakfast, morning tea, lunch, dinner. With very little input from them. And expect kids to be clothed and fed.

Women commented to me that many of these problems were problems of the past and the present, and that the situation in Mildura regarding women's involvement in decision making on the block had not changed a great deal over the past twenty, or even forty years. Several respondents told me that women wanted to be involved *differently* in the block business, but that their husbands had genuine difficulty understanding *why* women would not be content in the roles their mothers had fulfilled. However, respondents also noted that some women now had the option, and the opportunity, to leave the block or farm in the early years of their marriage if they recognised that they would not be content

to remain in an unequal partnership. This was illustrated at one of the rural women's gatherings when a young woman brought a workshop to a halt by announcing that she had just left her husband of five years, as he was unable to accept that she wanted to take a more active role in the management of the farm. She said that she left before they had children together because she 'did not want this to be her life.' As noted in Chapter Three and above, women generally viewed themselves as being apprenticed into inescapable roles on the block. Rather unusually, the woman at the gathering demonstrated that some women had the educational resources and economic power to now offer resistance to this destiny.

Women's Work and Women's Safety

When I interviewed the Workcover Officer (the Australian equivalent of a Health and Safety Executive Inspector) in Mildura and asked what the particular safety issues were for 'women at work' he replied that 'most farmer's wives are concerned for their husband's safety,' and went on to suggest that women generally did not work on the land. The asymmetry in the work relationship between block wives and their husbands was again amplified here: it was assumed that women on the block were safe, because it was assumed that *they did not work* on the block.

Of particular concern to some of my respondents was that block work was very chemical-intensive. However, the introduction of new technologies and 'innovative' herbicides and pesticides appeared to be intimately linked to notions of 'successful viticulture,' and thus masculinity in Mildura. In general men sprayed the chemicals over the vines (as this was a high status job) and women washed their overalls, and many women were concerned about the long term effects of chemical exposure on their husbands and themselves. Several also reported their perception that some birth defects were connected to pregnant women's exposure to chemicals whilst working on blocks. One woman told me:

Health status is a political construction. You know that comes into environmental issues as well you know. How can a mother maintain her health when she's out there pruning vines and being sprayed all over with God knows what, but they don't want to look at that because that would impact on the agriculture.

Others described how although chemicals which had now been withdrawn from use had been identified as causing fertility problems amongst male blockies, it was their wives

who had been pressured to undergo In-Vitro Fertilisation treatment in order to have children.

In interview, women told me that it was difficult to challenge the authoritative male voice of their husbands and blocky cohorts on the issue of block safety, and that this was particularly difficult for women who had married into farming families from outwith Mildura. Women told me they found it impossible to challenge 'this macho, fatalistic, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen' oratorical response from their husbands and male in-laws, when they raised issues of block safety. After expressing her concern about block children driving tractors, one woman said:

It's the big bluff again. The men say, it's perfectly safe, we've done this for years, I've driven [this machinery] from this age ... you can't challenge that.

Women discussed the chastisement and difficulties they experienced if they did not complete tasks on the block because they did not think that it would be safe to take the children with them to carry out the work. They also discussed the ambiguities of their husbands' definitions of what activities were, and were not, safe for children. For example, Andrew regularly drove off in the tractor and left Jesse without any adult supervision at the block house, as he said this would develop Jesse's 'independence.' However, when Jesse went to the supervised open-air swimming pool in Irymple with boys from his class, Andrew telephoned Krystyna and berated her for letting Jesse go to the swimming pool 'on his own.' Andrew also deployed stock phrases and used quotidian oratory to emphasise his authority on issues of safety. For example, when we were planting vines on the block I pointed out to Andrew that Jesse should not have been pushing his hands through the safety grid on the back of the water vat towards the rotating propeller on the vat, and on another occasion warned Andrew that Jesse had been playing with the mains electricity supply. In response to these and my comments about other similarly dangerous incidents Andrew simply said to me 'you'll think differently when you have children of your own.'

More seriously, in interview and in conversation, respondents discussed 'accidents that were not accidents' being used by men as an instrument to intimidate or punish women. For example, Krystyna told me that when her relationship with Andrew was at a low point, she had questioned whether two accidents were accidents. On one occasion she had been sprayed 'by accident' by Andrew with sulphur (to which she is allergic); and on another she crashed when she was asked to collect something on a farm bike (All Terrain Vehicle) that had faulty brakes, which Krystyna said Andrew had known about. After I had left

Mildura, and Krystyna had moved to Queensland the bike, a 'carrier of emotionally-charged memory' (Maschio 1998: 96) was sent to Queensland by Andrew. The bike, dispatched as a gift for Jesse, became an object like a weighted arrow projected towards Krystyna's personal space (Weiner 1991) which I would suggest Andrew knew would return trouble to her.⁵² As Carrier notes, transactions create an obligation to transact in a similar way again, and thus although Krystyna had left Mildura, Andrew was deploying gifts strategically both to intimidate her and to draw her back. Carrier writes:

People are able to transact only if they are *not independent* of each other. The gift transaction affirms and reproduces this mutual dependence, this relationship that links transactors. Their relationship makes them part of each other, and *in transacting they express and recreate that relationship, and so recreate their obligation to transact in a similar way again in the future* (Carrier 1995: 23 emphasis added).

It was also my experience that the reckless behaviour of men and boys which endangered women and girl's lives was viewed as 'normal' male behaviour. I would suggest that this had broader connections to the apparent acceptability of violence against women in Mildura (see Chapter Seven), and to be fair, it could be argued that on Andrew's block, Asperger's Syndrome played a part in the reckless behaviour. As Attwood notes:

Unfortunately, some males with Asperger's Syndrome have an authoritarian outlook on life with a rigid hierarchy where males are dominant over females. Thus, girls or mothers may be targeted when the person feels angry, as a means of releasing tension and agitation. They are also less likely to retaliate. When the incident is over, the person with Asperger's Syndrome can be visibly relaxed, but confused as to why everyone else continues to be so distressed (Attwood 1998: 162).

This would account for the incidents when Jesse (at times when he was not taking Ritalin) menaced me with a knife, and came close to garrotting me on the vine trellising when taking me for a ride on the large farm bike on the block—a ride that I had to bring to an end by wrestling him from the moving bike as we careered towards the main road bordering the block. However, it does not account for the absence of any wider social reaction to these incidents whereby this behaviour was viewed as 'normal'; or for the acceptance of the injury of two female wwoofers who Jesse also took on bike rides (arranged as with my bike ride, with Andrew's blessing) before and after my potentially fatal excursion with Jesse.

⁵² When the bike arrived in Queensland, Jesse proceeded to cause havoc driving the farm bike recklessly around their suburban neighbourhood. Not surprisingly the resultant conflict with neighbours played a part in influencing Krystyna's decision to return with Jesse to Mildura.

Provision

Quotidian oratory on the issue of 'provision' was one of the most powerful examples of male oratory obliterating women's testimony, an act which further diminished the significance of women's work on the blocks.

I was told in interview and in conversation, that whatever the financial state of the block, the off-block income of women (provided through, for example, teaching or nursing) and the on-block work contribution of women, were almost always obscured and devalued by male statements of provision. For example, Andrew frequently made verbal statements to me about his role as the 'provider' for the household, and for Krystyna and Jesse. He often insisted to me that he was 'providing': providing care for Jesse; food and shelter for wwoofers; and that he had provided for Krystyna's daughters in the past, and would continue to provide for Krystyna as a wife. He also frequently mentioned the cost of this provision, without apparently taking into account the work provided by the wwoofers, or Krystyna's past work. In contrast to Carrier's observations on the way in which transactions can occur between moral persons within a marriage, in Mildura it appeared that the wife would be socially subsumed into the husband's life, denying the validity of a woman's ability to transact independently. Carrier writes:

The couple also must transact, must give and take in an appropriate way, but although this may resemble transaction between individuals, it is more complex. The couple's relationship entails a communal existence, a structure that encompasses and defines the two people and makes them "moral persons" within the marriage. One spouse does not merely transact with the other, but at the same time contributes to that communal existence, that "us" that redefines "you" and "me" (Carrier 1995: 34).

Therefore despite the fact that Krystyna's income comprised of her low profits from her millinery business supplemented by welfare payments, Andrew frequently told his mother and me that Krystyna and Jesse still lived off his benefice. One of my respondents told me that it would be unacceptable to challenge this statement in public—and thereby suggest that a member of the Jones family was reliant on welfare payments—as a blocky's quotidian oratory would be accepted as the social, if not the experiential, 'truth.'

When discussing provision, respondents often described the ambiguous relationship between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in Mildura. Although two generations living on the same block appeared to be unusual amongst the women I met, it was common for the father-in-law or mother-in-law of the respondents to remain involved in the block

business, due to their reliance on payments from the block in lieu of a pension. Several respondents discussed the resulting tensions involved in running a household based on allowances made by men who had little or no involvement in domestic activities, or mothers-in-law who may have had very different lifestyle expectations. For example, one woman told me that her husband had insisted that she pass all the housekeeping receipts to him, which he then passed on to his mother to check over. In turn, the husband would then critique her spending, for example on one occasion following a serious illness she was reprimanded for spending money on vitamins.

The representation of the male blocky as the 'provider,' and the assumption that women's work was inconsequential, was further reinforced by the unspoken understanding that whilst women's ability to purchase goods was dependent on their husbands favour⁵³ or approval, men's spending was beyond question. 'Prestige' spending on cars, guns, sports activities, alcohol and farm machinery, was seen as something that was at the discretion of the blocky, rather than something that would be discussed with the family. In interview, women gave examples of their concern about this. For example, one respondent discussed a neighbour who drove around town in an prestigious four wheel drive jeep but was not given a sufficient allowance by her husband to have her hair cut and styled. Likewise, heavy speeding fines inflicted on men breaking the law by speeding through residential areas were treated with bravado by blockies rather than seen as depriving the family of essential income. Spending money on cars rather than items which would benefit the entire family or provide home comforts appeared to be a long-standing tendency in Mildura.⁵⁴

⁵³ Abu-Lughod has also commented on the tensions within households caused by male control of disposable income. She writes that the well-being and standard of living of young brides '*now depend enormously on the favor of husbands* in a world where everything costs money, where there are many more things to buy with it, and where women have almost no independent access to it. That women's resistance to unfairness in the distribution of purchased goods, from blankets to bars of soap and boxes of matches, causes the most frequent conflicts in most households confirms this; *men's powers now importantly include the power to buy things and to punish and reward women through giving them*' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 50 emphasis added).

⁵⁴ McIntyre comments in 1948, 'most growers regard cars as one of the most important amenities. This is shown by the fact that many of them have spent money on buying cars rather than on improved housing, household amenities and furniture. Many people criticise growers for this, but their replies indicate that growers regard motor-cars as contributing greatly to a higher standard of living. A car, they consider, enables them to enjoy the services which only a large town can provide, and gives them a wider selection of friends and entertainment' (McIntyre 1948: 112).

The issue of male blockies' reluctance to acknowledge women's financial independence was brought sharply into focus during fieldwork over the issue of credit cards. While I was working on Andrew's block, I needed to buy a magazine about organic farming and so one lunchtime, I rang the relevant publishers, gave them my credit card number and ordered the magazine. I then came back to the kitchen and put my credit card down on the table while I finished my sandwich. Andrew was visibly shocked, and asked if it was my own credit card? I told Andrew that I had two credit cards, to which he asked 'who pays for them?' Andrew then suggested that women could not be trusted with credit cards, as Krystyna had run up 'huge bills' on his credit card when Jesse was born. Krystyna later told me that she had used the credit card solely for buying nappies and baby clothes.

Secrecy around the block accounts was also a source of tension between women and their husbands' families. Although at first I was sceptical about Krystyna's insistence that Andrew was hiding accounts from her, I was proved to be wrong. Immediately after Jesse's diagnosis as a child with Asperger's Syndrome, Andrew appeared to be rallying round with a view to helping Krystyna. While I was away in Canberra, Andrew took round the pumpkin harvest (which I and the other woofers had planted and weeded) for roadside sale at Krystyna's cabin. Andrew told Krystyna that the money from the pumpkins could be for Jesse, and when I returned to Mildura I found Jesse thrilled with almost A\$100 in small change from the pumpkin sales. Krystyna was, however, distraught because Andrew had telephoned and demanded the money from the sales, saying that Jesse was 'spoilt' and did not know the value of money. I spent the evening with a delighted Jesse counting his money for him, and suggested to Krystyna, that she should telephone Andrew and tell him that she would open a bank account for Jesse and deposit the money into it as the start of a savings account. Andrew disagreed, but Krystyna stood firm, and I went with Krystyna and Jesse to open a bank account the following day.

At the bank, Krystyna and I sat behind the new accounts desk with Jesse as the bank teller typed Jesse's name into the computer. The bank teller then seemed confused and asked if Jesse already had some bank accounts? When Krystyna said 'no,' the assistant flicked the monitor round to show a screen full of a listing of accounts in Jesse's name registered at his grandmother's address. Krystyna gasped and then said, 'no, that was his grandmother's address,' and rapidly realising her *faux pas*, the bank teller flicked the monitor back and cleared the screen, leaving Krystyna and I leaning over the desk, straining to catch any details before the screen was cleared. According to other researchers I met in Australia, the accounts were likely to have been 'trust accounts' used by the blockies to minimise their tax liabilities. Krystyna's ignorance of such accounts was evidently commonplace,

and the researchers told me that such accounts were regularly used by husbands and their extended family to conceal funds and the real value of the farm assets from wives. This practice served as an 'insurance policy' for a husband and his family should the wife seek a divorce and, more specifically, a divorce settlement including fifty percent of the value of the farm. Leipens notes that this area is one of such sensitivity that even the women in agriculture movement has been unable to assess how or if these types of financial arrangements have changed in recent years. She writes:

The movement's publicity and lobbying activities concerning legal issues have resulted in both individual and government changes. Due to the sensitive nature of families' legal arrangements, little evidence has been obtainable on the impact of the *women in agriculture* legal agendas at the level of individual family farms (Leipens 1996: 232).

'Acceptable' Women's Paid Work and Craft Work

Women who were married to blockies exercised caution when talking about paid work. They told me that in the past their paid work was always viewed as something they were doing in addition to, or as an activity of secondary importance, to work on the block, and their domestic responsibilities. The understanding that a woman's place was in the home, even though in practice women often had to work to support the block income, was accepted as the publicly stated norm, and as in Smalltown 'It is always a short step from customary to natural and right, and Smalltowners take this step readily' (Dempsey 1992: 139).

One woman told me that when she worked as a school teacher during the 1970s and 1980s, during every harvest, people would comment 'I thought you'd be working on the block,' when she was at school or in the town. Her year-round contribution of a good teacher's salary would be, she felt, viewed as less significant than the fact that she was *not* helping her husband with perhaps eight weeks of unpaid harvest work amongst the vines. Some women told me that they worked full time off the block, and worked on the block whenever they were at home, and whilst I was told that some women enjoyed that lifestyle, I was also told that others were effectively working double shifts under family pressure. One day during harvest a respondent told me that one of her co-workers had arrived in tears at work after her mother-in-law had berated her for putting her work as a nurse before the welfare of her husband and the block, despite the fact the co-worker had worked through the evening at the block, after a full day at work; and in spite of the year round contribution her salary made to the household income. The ambiguities here

were clear, and one could only imagine that the woman's mother-in-law was somehow unaware of the significance of her income to the household.

Although in interview and in private women expressed strong views on the need for greater recognition of women's contribution to block work and of their work off the block, in public women understated their contribution to the block and the significance of their paid work. A prosperous business woman successfully downplayed her work in public by saying 'I sit in my office and do my bits and pieces'; and similarly, in public, women would only tend to acknowledge that they 'helped out' on the block. This is similar to Dempsey's observations about differences in marital incomes in Smalltown. He writes 'her paid work is meant to supplement his income. He remains the provider even if she earns more than he does' (1992: 249). Likewise, one of my respondents said:

At home we laugh and say it's [the block] a hobby farm to keep him [the husband] out of mischief. My income is supporting it, but because our relationship is strong and we know where we are at, that's been okay. We live within our means, and in good years we do well. As far as everyone else is concerned though, the block is the family business.

The ability to participate in paid work was, however, greatly valued by my respondents, and women engaged in paid work for a number of reasons. For many, their income was simply incorporated into household expenditure on basic food and clothing items, but for others their paid work gave them a disposable income. Some women engaged in seasonal work with a view to buying a particular item, such as a new carpet for the home, whereas others described working as a means of maintaining an identity other than that of a 'blocky's missus.' For example, one woman told me that her daughter worked as a receptionist in Mildura twice a week and that her wages merely covered the cost of childcare, hair styling, and the makeup she required in order to carry out the job. While her husband opposed his wife doing this job, the mother recognised the importance to her daughter of leaving the block twice a week and thereby retaining a more complex identity

Perhaps as a response to men's reluctance to publicly acknowledge women's work on the block and in the local economy, the relationship between women and their craft work appeared to have taken on a particular significance in Mildura. In Mildura, craft work was synonymous with representations of 'rural women,' and the craft show and competition at the annual Mildura Show was viewed as the women's display area, whereas 'men's business' was conducted across the show grounds, and through the stock and produce competitions.

In Mildura, there were numerous craft groups ranging from what I was told was an exclusive Embroiderer's Guild to patchwork groups, classes in blanket embroidery and numerous other crafts (for example rug making and pottery), the CWA craft groups, and several successful craft shops which stocked the materials for these hobbies. Throughout fieldwork, I was conscious of the significance of craft work as: hobby-based work carried out at home; a socially acceptable means of stepping out of the domestic sphere to meet with other women through craft groups; and as a source of personal income through developing craft work into a small or micro businesses. Craft therefore seemed to be at once a therapy, a source of networking and support, and an acceptable and unchallenged arena in which women could attempt to generate a personal income. Following Parker, who considers the history and significance of embroidery in *The Subversive Stitch*, I would suggest that in relation to women's craft work:

Rather than ridiculing them, or turning embarrassed from our history, we should ask why they selected such subjects, what secondary gains they accrued from absolute conformity to the feminine ideal, and how they were able to make meanings of their own while overtly living up to the oppressive stereotype (Parker 1984:13).

Women described craft carried out by women at home as a relaxation or personal therapy activity, and for some women as disguised resting. The expectation of constant work for women on the block amongst the elder generation led some women to comment 'excuse me for sitting'⁵⁵ when we were having a coffee break from working, whilst others commented that when resting, if doing craft, one could also be working. One woman told me:

I've always done it, growing up on a farm where I was always taught to knit and sew. And then having kids, when you're tired and exhausted all the time, there's not much that you can do, but you can always knit and sew, and embroider. When you're exhausted and you lay back in your chair, and you think 'oh what can I do, I'm so tired but I've achieved nothing today, oh I'll do some cross stitch.' And you can do some mindless cross stitch, and you think oh well I've achieved something. And that's sort of been my outlet, and has satisfied my need to be doing something and achieving something. It's been my sewing and knitting. And I can sit back and I can be almost be asleep and can knit even the most complicated patterns as relaxation.

⁵⁵ It may be possible to contrast this with Wearing's observations on breast feeding. It could be that craft, like extended breast feeding, may be viewed as 'operative.' She writes 'sometimes breast-feeding is a chance to "rest" for a few minutes without too much criticism. An old Irish proverb says something to the effect that "the only times a woman should be seen sitting down are in church or with a babe to her breast"'(Wearing 1988: 170).

Others interpreted the numerous craft groups as the acceptable face of women's groups in Mildura where women could meet and gain support from other women using craft (of whatever kind) as a cloak of legitimacy for meeting, sitting together and talking, or as one woman commented 'moaning about our husbands.' Gullestad also comments on the few legitimate self-centred leisure activities that women could lay claim to in Bergen, and suggests that the women's sewing circle was one of these (1984: 167). Likewise, Parker comments that 'sewing allowed women to sit together without feeling they were neglecting their families, wasting time or betraying their husbands by maintaining independent social bonds' (Parker 1984: 14-15).

Women in Mildura appeared to take their craft activity very seriously, and this was perhaps, as Creighton observes in relation to women's craft groups in Japan, part of a strategy to ensure they were *allowed* to continue with the craft, and to ensure that they could not be accused of having an interest in a frivolous hobby.⁵⁶ Creighton writes:

For women with work or family responsibilities, a hobby simply for fun would be *wagamama* (selfish). However, the same activity is applauded when reinterpreted as a means of developing the self through an educational hobby (Creighton 1995: 470).

In her work in Japan, Creighton also considered 'how leisure activities are used to construct meaning and self-identity and can reveal ways women find fulfilment and invoke agency through these activities' (Creighton 1995: 469). This was particularly important in Mildura in terms of women generating a source of independent income which would not be incorporated into the household income. As Wearing observes, this work was very much 'informal' work, invisible to both their husbands and the tax man. Wearing writes:

Those who are in the grey area of informal work—between the recognised labour market and the housewife—may not claim to be workers either, in this economic sense. Invisible, informal work includes bartering, the trading of goods in informal settings (for example, in flea markets), and "off the books" or "under the table" employment (Wearing 1988:22).

In Mildura, women had the opportunity to sell their craft work on Sunday mornings in the Mildura shopping mall, a weekly event comparable to English Victorian bazaars

⁵⁶ One example of this in Mildura was the women who were interested in 'stamping'—collecting rubber stamps with different designs, which were used with coloured inks to 'stamp' the designs on to pieces of card to create gift cards or bookmarks. Two of these women ran regular formal workshops on 'stamping,' which involved cutting out pieces of card and stamping the rubber stamps on to the card. I attended one of these workshops with some of the CWA ladies.

described by George Eliot as events which 'permitted women to cross the threshold into public life, to be mobile themselves instead of acting as anchors for others' (Parker 1984: 163).

Further afield, the romantic ideal of rural women using craft work to rescue ailing farm businesses was a popular theme of 'inspirational' (spoken accounts of rural women's achievements presented by the women themselves) at rural women's gatherings. At the Victorian Gathering in 1997, one woman spoke about her wool duvet making business, and women at the South Australia Gathering presented information about their dressmaking 'business ring,' and a fashion show of their designs. I would argue that women understood that these enterprises were the most strategic way to secure an independent income for themselves. The work provided a complementary business to the farm or block; identified women's business concerns as bounded by the domestic sphere and domestic interests (not conflicting with masculine concerns); and as a 'serious hobby' rather than a 'business,' in no way threatened the status of their husband as the provider for the family. This is perhaps a recurring theme in representations of gendered rurality, illustrated by Parker's historical observation that:

The overt reason for fostering rural craft industries [in the nineteenth century] was the economic hardship of peasant women whose husband's wage could not support a family, but a mixture of moralism and practicality informed the work: a contemporary writer [Elizabeth Gaskell in *Wives and Daughters*] described a worker in a rural industry as 'one of those to whom the industry has been a real blessing, enabling her to keep her tiny home together without being a burden to anyone' (Parker 1984: 178).

As a corollary of his statements of provision, Andrew saw Krystyna's business as a hobby, and was bemused when Krystyna refused to lend him her industrial sewing machine—an integral part of her workshop. This occurred when Andrew found out I could sew, and suggested that I could make new curtains for the drying racks, instead of having to pay a local seamstress to make them. Krystyna said it was completely unreasonable to expect her to dismantle her workshop and risk breaking the machine in order to save a few dollars on the cost of the curtains. Meanwhile, Andrew was at a loss to explain, or understand, why lending him a sewing machine could cause a problem for Krystyna. Parker observes in relation to embroidery 'when women embroider, it is seen not as art, but entirely as the expression of femininity. And, crucially it is categorised as a craft' (Parker 1984: 5). In the same way, Andrew considered Krystyna's work to be a hobby 'made in the domestic sphere, usually by women, for "love"' (Parker 1984:5), as opposed to a serious business or art. However the success, and critical acclaim for her work (outwith Mildura)

illustrated that even when 'limited to practising art with needle and thread, women have nevertheless sewn a subversive stitch—managing to make meanings of their own in the very medium intended to inculcate self-effacement' (Parker 1984: 215), something Krystyna had achieved with considerable success.

It was interesting that respondents suggested that the craft interest in Mildura could be taken as both representative of restraint and conformity, or autonomy, in the town. For example, Krystyna's millinery business (although enjoying widespread success and media acclaim at all the festivals she attended), was viewed as unorthodox and unappealing in Mildura. Therefore when the new community centre and library opened in Mildura in the winter of 1997 and a small craft shop was opened in the centre to showcase local craftsmen and women, Krystyna's work was excluded. Krystyna offered to supply hats for the shop, but the centre manager they said that they would not be suitable, and preferred instead to stock some local pottery, mass produced souvenirs, and standard *Akubra* Australian hats. Likewise, one quilter who exhibited her unorthodox and innovative quilts across Australia observed that hers was a creative process (not best suited to Mildura) and that she had no interest in doing 'pretty pretties' which were so popular amongst women in Mildura. She told me:

They used to look at me sideways first, they think 'she doesn't know anything'—its [the quilt] got to be pretty. A lot of people don't get over that ... [in teaching] I couldn't take them where they hadn't been before. Copying is all they want to do. Women here don't want to try anything they think they might fail at—they don't have the time or the energy. I don't mind taking risks. You think you're a bit weird at first, but you're not.

Her comments were illustrated when an exhibition staged by the members of one of the local quilting classes at the Mildura museum revealed a series of almost identical 'heritage' quilts, a 'pretty pretty' style of quilt made from pastel coloured synthetic materials and nylon lace. The exhibition brought to mind Parker's comments on a late nineteenth century needlework exhibition at Royal School of Art. She wrote:

The uniformity of style was a result of the school's credo that 'each must copy humbly and faithfully the design which should always be before her'—a mode of working in line with a feminine ideal of humility and docility (Parker 1984: Plate 90).

However, I would suggest that taken within the context of the constraints of appropriate gender roles for women in Mildura, all of the craft activities could be taken to exemplify different forms of women's fragmentary resistance. This applies equally to the exquisite

work of the Embroiderer's Guild to the hand-knitted stuffed toys sold in the Sunday market.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed women's personal narratives of work interpreted as the most socially acceptable way for women to articulate their dissatisfaction with gender relations within their marriages. I have discussed women's pride in their capacity for hard work and shown how this goes hand in hand with frustrations about the way in which their work was not validated either by their husbands or their extended families.

Block work is particularly emblematic of rural women's predicament, and I have shown that there was a clear difference between women's and men's understandings of the value of women's work. Women saw their own work as something which had the potential to build a lasting personal and economic relationship between themselves, their husbands and their land. However, men understood their wives' work as drudgery, labour, or 'favours' owed to them as part of their domestic and wifely responsibilities.

The chapter has also shown that women's resistance to oppressive work arrangements was transformed by male oratory describing women who offered resistance as 'not able to cope.' I have also explored the relationship between men's expectation that they should be 'looked after,' and the frequently expressed oratorical statements of their ability and duty to 'provide' for the family. Finally, I discussed how women's craft work in Mildura may be seen both as part of a strategy of resistance, and as a means of providing a cloak of legitimacy to enable women to meet together.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE⁵⁷ AND INTIMIDATION

This chapter discusses how domestic violence and intimidation was accommodated in personal narratives, and in family life in Mildura. Renzetti and Lee (1993) question why research on domestic violence focuses on why women remain with abusive partners, rather than on what factors create the circumstances that make domestic violence possible. They suggest that this trend results in research which 'creates a scientific and popular milieu for blaming the victim' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 28). In addition, the prevailing method of recruitment for research on 'sensitive' topics such as domestic violence, has been to seek research respondents who have sought assistance via shelters or social services (Renzetti and Lee 1993, and Bergen 1993). By contrast, since domestic violence was not something I had planned to research in Australia, my fieldwork results in a discussion of domestic violence from the perspective of women who experienced domestic violence but did not seek publicly available assistance, and from the perspective of women who remained in situations of domestic violence and did not seek to leave.

Such women had an informed understanding of how the circumstances that made domestic violence possible arose and were sustained in Mildura, and how domestic violence was

⁵⁷ For the purposes of this ethnography I refer to the definitions of domestic violence used by the *National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit* (see below and Appendix 11), the Mallee Domestic Violence Unit (see Appendix 12); and refer to the Regional and Rural Women's Unit literature review of domestic violence in regional Australia which provides the following definition:

There are a number of ways to define domestic violence. In this report we have used the definition agreed by Heads of Government at the National Domestic Violence Summit convened by the Prime Minister in 1997 which underpins work under Partnerships.

Domestic Violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women in a relationship or after separation. Domestic violence takes a number of forms both physical and psychological. The commonly acknowledged forms of domestic violence are: physical and sexual violence; emotional and social abuse; and economic deprivation.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities prefer to use the term family violence which was defined in a broad manner to encapsulate not only the extended nature of Indigenous families but also the context of a range of forms of violence occurring between kinspeople in Indigenous communities (The Women's Services Network 2000: 2).

accommodated by perpetrators and the women and children who were affected by it. According to the domestic violence workers I met in Australia, a woman seeking publicly available assistance will attempt to leave a situation of domestic violence, and then return to it, on average six or seven times before (if ever) making a final physical break from the perpetrator. The material in this chapter echoes the domestic violence workers' experiences.

An important focus of the chapter is also the way in which domestic violence was discussed by the women I met. I argue that the public discourse on domestic violence in Mildura can largely be attributed to the introduction of a federally-funded domestic violence shelter in the town, which provided a vocabulary for the discussion of domestic violence through 'veiled speech.' In contrast to the candour of women speaking about domestic violence in private, it was significant that in public, women were only prepared to discuss 'the problem' of domestic violence, rather than personal experience of violence in their families. This was because in Mildura to speak in public about personal experience of domestic violence would, in effect, name the perpetrator. The taboo on naming individual men as perpetrators, rather than on talking about domestic violence in general, illustrated again the asymmetry within the relationships between men and women in Mildura.⁵⁸

A discussion of fear is particularly important in this chapter, as on return from fieldwork, when discussing my work I was repeatedly asked by friends and colleagues 'why didn't the women just ... leave, contact the police, take legal advice,' and so on, in order to extricate themselves from these complex situations. As I discuss below, I would suggest that *fear* of a range of things from real to imagined possible future domestic violence scenarios played the most important part in subordinating women in relationships with violent men, and played a key role in sustaining inequality in Mildura. I discuss fear in relation to the fear of the quotidian experience of domestic violence; fear of violence and guns; fear of involvement with other women experiencing domestic violence for fear of retaliation; and fear of using the law in women's favour.

⁵⁸ Renzetti and Lee comment that when carrying out sensitive research 'the more sensitive or threatening the topic under examination, the more difficult sampling is likely to be, because the potential participants have greater need to hide their involvement' (Renzetti and Lee 1993: 30). I would suggest that the women I interviewed and talked to about domestic violence brought a pragmatism to the conversations we had about domestic violence, which reflected the matter-of-fact approach required to accommodate abuse in relationships in Mildura.

Finally, I describe an episode drawn from Krystyna's personal narratives describing her attempts to obtain a diagnosis of her son as a child with Asperger's Syndrome. The episode and events contained therein illustrate again the power of men's oratory above women's testimony, and illustrate the consequences of women's resistance alluded to in other writer's accounts of life in rural Australian communities.

Domestic Violence and Representations of Rurality

Domestic violence is a subject that does not rest comfortably within rural studies or anthropology. In rural studies, representations of rurality and the rurality debate have not alluded to issues of domestic violence possibly because of the sensitivity of the subject, the muted nature of the discussion of domestic violence in rural communities, or the insistence by some that it is an issue best dealt with by the communities themselves (see for example, Clark 1997). Isolated references have been made to the issue of domestic violence in the rural studies literature (for example, Feyen 1989; Tice 1990; Gagné 1992; Green 1994; Hornisty 1994; Fiene 1995; and Alston 1997), but within rural studies, the issue remains both under-theorised (Moore 1994) and inadequately represented.

Anthropological engagement with domestic violence research has, however, been reflected upon by several anthropologists (for example, Harvey and Gow 1994), and challenges facing anthropologists who seek to engage with domestic violence research has been the subject of some discussion. For example, Counts writes:

The reactions of some of our colleagues when we began to discuss wife-beating and battering as a cross-cultural problem gave us insight into why anthropologists have until very recently either ignored domestic violence or given it only summary treatment. Some argued that we should not exploit of host's hospitality by exposing a dark side of their culture; others said that they would talk about the problem but would not publish it because they feared such publication would result in their being denied permission to return to the field; some were concerned that their informants might be punished if it were known that they had discussed the subject with an outsider (Counts 1992: xi-xii).

Whereas Gullestad explicitly addresses physical violence (Gullestad 1984: 292), perhaps more typical is the approach taken by Dempsey who makes no direct reference to domestic violence in his publications on Smalltown, but hints at women's reluctance to 'push things too far':

Nor is it surprising that they [women] are careful '*not to push things too far*' in the private sphere with husbands who are unsympathetic to their attempts to gain more autonomy for themselves by incorporating their partners more fully in child care or domestic tasks. *The material, social and emotional costs of rebellion are just too high, and they know it: 'It's in a wife's interests to keep in her husband's good books!'* A number of younger wives volunteered such a comment (Dempsey 1992: 269 emphasis added).

Had Dempsey's book been proposed for publication 10 years later, I would imagine that the very public discourse on rural domestic violence in Australia from the mid 1980s through the 1990s would have enabled him to directly name domestic violence as an issue Smalltowners would need to address. Rural academics and activists such as Lawrence (1995) and Alston (1997) have played an important role in engaging academics with this research issue in Australia.

The Impact of State and Federal Domestic Violence Programmes and Policies in Mildura.

Corrin observes that 'how debates and discussions around male violence against women have been structured in the past have radically affected women's ability to think through strategies of resistance' (Corrin 1996: 9), and I would suggest that the policy and public discourse on domestic violence in Australia played a significant role in influencing how women could begin to address domestic violence in Mildura. In Australia, domestic violence moved on to the national political and policy agenda after 1986, when consultations with women organised by the Office for Status of Women (OSW) revealed that domestic violence was a key concern for women. This resulted in a three year education campaign organised by the OSW (Eisenstein 1996). Eisenstein comments that 'some of the services for women won widespread acceptance. Refuges in particular caught the public imagination and were eventually supported across the political spectrum' (Eisenstein 1996: 51-52). She continues:

Underlying these achievements was an acceptance by governments of a feminist analysis. Thus, for example, on the issue of domestic violence, as the result of long years of careful education and lobbying by femocrats and activists, Australian prime ministers were prepared to embrace publicly the concept that the battering of wives was part of a systemic structural feature of society, rather than an aberration linked to criminality and individual perversity (ibid.: 62).

As noted in Chapter One, Sawyer also comments on the particular significance of a feminist approach to domestic violence issues in Australia. She writes:

As feminists outside government uncovered the extraordinary level of violence against women and children, feminists inside persuaded governments to address this issue for the first time. Feminist analysis of issues such as domestic violence and child sexual abuse has much greater official acceptance than in the United Kingdom or the United States (Sawyer 1990: 251).

It is also significant that *rural* domestic violence issues have been incorporated within the national agenda in Australia. During the last weeks of my fieldwork, on the second International Rural Women's Day (October 15th 1997) Judi Moylan, the Minister for the Status of Women and John Anderson, the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, launched the *National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit* which was the result of work carried out by the National Domestic Violence Forum. The publication marked the rural outcome of the culmination of ten years of campaigning to create and sustain state and federal campaigns and publications on domestic violence: for example, Women's Co-ordination Unit (1986); Department for Women (1997), Victorian Centres Against Sexual Assault (1996); and Victorian Community Council Against Violence (n.d.). As discussed below, all of these have made a tangible difference to both a recognition of the scale of the problem, and the extent of services available to women in Mildura, and elsewhere in rural Australia.

During and after my fieldwork, the Howard Administration was criticised for what was interpreted as the reduction in support for women's programmes and policy initiatives. In relation to domestic violence, however, it was significant that rural women's activists told me during fieldwork that the Howard Administration could not take the political risk of reducing funding for domestic violence shelters in rural communities particularly because of the high profile support given to the issue by the Country Women's Association (CWA) at a state and federal level. Notably at the launch of the *National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit*, John Anderson commented:

It was Mrs Tom [a former CWA State President who campaigned specifically on rural domestic violence issues] who gave a presentation on domestic violence in rural communities at the meeting I convened with the Prime Minister and Minister Newman to mark the inaugural World Rural Women's Day last year. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Country Women's Association in highlighting the issue of domestic violence (Commonwealth of Australia 1997).

The Minister's commitment to tackling domestic violence issues in rural areas (and what I was told by rural women's activists and others, was the effective ring-fencing and protection of money for rural domestic programmes, in rounds of public spending cuts at the time of my fieldwork) reflected not only the political sensitivity of funding for domestic violence, but also a very public recognition of the extent of the problem in rural communities by a politically conservative Liberal and National Party Administration. Subsequently, the Regional and Rural Women's Unit, commissioned a literature review of domestic violence in regional Australia (The Women's Services Network 2000) which was launched in 2000 by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson. At the same time funding commitments of A\$500,000 to support rural domestic violence services were announced as part of the Australian Federal Government's A\$50 million *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Initiative*.

In Mildura, these policies had a very real effect on both public perception of domestic violence, and services provided to assist women and children being affected by abuse. In Mildura the policy agenda and policy arrived in the tangible form of the domestic violence shelter, which provided both a resource, and a vocabulary to use when discussing domestic violence. During interviews and conversations when I asked about 'services or policies for women,' most of the women I spoke to referred primarily to the importance of improving obstetric care; sustaining breast cancer services; and of the critical importance of domestic violence initiatives in rural areas, and particularly the presence of the domestic violence and sexual assault unit in Mildura. Thus the unit, and the services the social workers employed there delivered, became a frame of reference to discuss the experience of domestic violence in the community. Until that time, as illustrated below in the comments from one interview, respondents told me there had been no *public* recognition of domestic violence in Mildura:

Gill: In Scotland, in the research I was doing, people tended to take the view that domestic violence isn't really a problem in rural areas, or where it is, it's handled internally by the communities.

Respondent: Yeah, strange that, we didn't have domestic violence either, until we had a domestic violence service, and so they've been busily inventing the problems too ever since.

The Introduction of The Domestic Violence Unit in Mildura

At the time of fieldwork, domestic violence services had been established in Mildura for just over ten years. In the light of events that occurred during fieldwork (see below), Krystyna often told me it was ironic that before she was married to Andrew, she had played an important role in establishing the shelter, and had been what she termed a 'pioneer feminist' in the town.⁵⁹ Alongside other women—most of whom had subsequently left Mildura—in the mid 1980s Krystyna campaigned for funding for a women's shelter, and worked to expose domestic violence and child abuse in Mildura. Krystyna told me that this campaigning work had been extremely unpopular and unwelcome in the town, and during fieldwork several people told me that in the 1980s many men and women in Mildura did not want domestic violence issues brought into the public domain. Krystyna said that people in Mildura did not like women suggesting that the town was 'not pure,' and that the 'pioneer feminists' were commonly referred to as 'shit stirrers from the south' (i.e. Melbourne).

A newspaper report of the time explained Krystyna's view of the situation in the 1980s:

According to social worker Christine [sic] Schweizer, the incidence of domestic violence is greater than people realise—or want to realise. She said that with her work at Emmaus House [a night shelter in Mildura, supported at that time by church groups], she received up to five enquiries a week from women subjected to violence. She said the house could not adequately cater for those women because it was only open at night, and also because they were terrified of men ... Ms Schweizer cited examples of women she had counselled, whose husbands didn't give them enough money for housekeeping, then blamed them for being bad housewives. She said most women were victims of domestic violence for years, before they decided to make a move.

Women seek refuge from home violence by Melinda Tankard. *The Sunraysia Daily* 24th August 1984.

At that time and in partnership with a woman who was described to me as one of the so called 'power pussies' (see Chapter Four) in Mildura, Krystyna then raised funds and opened the first publicly funded women's refuge in rural Victoria, called Nydia House. Krystyna and others involved in the shelter worked hours of unpaid overtime, and

⁵⁹ It was ironic that over the intervening years, her marital status and Andrew's oratory (see below) had transformed her from a self-styled and relatively powerful 'outlaw who objectively grants the force of the law to the law he transgresses in the mere fact that, by hiding in order to transgress it, he adapts his conduct to the sanctions which the law has the force to impose on him' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 14) to a social *outcast*, shunned by the same community which had, to some extent, courted her in her *outlaw* years.

Krystyna told me that the work by the women was politically motivated and that the women had been inspired 'from the heart.'

The refuge was run by the Sunraysia Women's Collective which had a radical reputation, and eventually the Collective itself split following divisions between two groups led by the 'power pussy' and Krystyna respectively. Krystyna said the split was along 'class lines,' with her group (and their egalitarian approach) being opposed to the 'power pussy's' preference for hierarchical management. However, when I asked others about the early history of the shelter, and the disputes—which were reported in the local press at the time⁶⁰—everyone I asked claimed to be unable to remember. One person began to tell me about the episodes, but then she remembered that I was friendly with Krystyna and knew who the 'power pussy' was, and decided she could not recall any of the detail after all.

By the time of fieldwork, the radical and controversial 1980s women's shelter had been through at least two changes of management, and by 1996 was a domestic violence and sexual assault unit run by professional social workers. The changes in personnel; location; management style; publicity material; and public relations at the unit, had built bridges between the social workers and the broader community, and according to my respondents, had engendered a sense of community 'ownership' of the unit amongst influential communities of interest in Mildura. The service provided high, medium, and low security accommodation, and an outreach service. One respondent commented that as a result of the outreach work of the staff at the unit, it was 'now very well accepted within the community that regrettably domestic violence is part of our community. It is happening to

60 *'The Sunraysia Women's Education Support and Awareness Group has received a A\$3,500 grant from the Department of Community Services ... It will be used for renting office space, telephone, costs for supporting volunteers and insurance for the support group formed a year ago in the district for Sunraysia Women ... Spokesperson for the group Ms Christine Schweizer, said the WESAG wanted to raise the status of women and establish a women's resource and information centre in Sunraysia. It is an separate organisation from the Sunraysia Women's Collective, which is involved with establishing a women's refuge. Mrs Schweizer said WESAG was concerned with the protection of children, poverty, poor housing, lack of transport and childcare, women's health, basic human rights, the shortcomings of the social environment, further education and employment for women. "We meet informally once a week to discuss problems in our everyday lives and decide what action can be taken", she said.... Three members of WESAG attended the National Campaign for Economic Justice in Canberra, organised by the Council for Single Mother and her Child. Ms Schweizer said those attending had lengthy discussions with members of parliament and presented them with a pre-budget submission. She said the aim of the Campaign for Economic Justice was to highlight the widespread poverty of children in Australia. "One fifth of Australian children are living in poverty" she said.'* Grant Boost for Group The Mildura Midweek. May 20th 1986. Page 3 (emphasis added).

people, and they need the service.' Statistics were available on the level of domestic violence in Mildura, and the workers at the unit told me that their workload suggested that there was a high level of domestic violence in Mildura. They told me that 'anecdotally' they could say the incidence was very high and that their services were fully stretched all year, however, they were also aware that statistical comparisons with other parts of country Victoria and urban/rural comparisons would not be meaningful, due to limited data availability.⁶¹ Therefore they could not assess whether incidents of domestic violence occurred at a higher rate in Mildura than elsewhere. However, the literature review commissioned by the Rural and Regional Women's Unit, states that 'where comparable data exists, they indicate that there is a higher reported incidence of domestic violence in remote and rural communities than in metropolitan settings' (The Women's Services Network 2000: 3).

In parallel to CWA support at a national level, it was also clear that in recent years the involvement of the Carinya Branch of the CWA (the local branch whose meetings I attended during fieldwork) with the Mildura unit had brought legitimacy to the work of the unit and had facilitated the increased involvement of 'respectable' elements of the Mildura community with the unit. One respondent commented that the action of Carinya CWA in adopting the unit as the branch charity—which simply involved gift giving at Christmas and regular contact with the unit through the year—was very significant in a town like Mildura. Her comment, 'how *conservative* a group do you get, and look at them addressing the issue,' was echoed by several other respondents.⁶²

Respondents told me that presence of the unit in the town was viewed as important because it made public the previously private issue of domestic violence in Mildura. In interview, one respondent told me that her work had brought her into contact with the service, and that experience had made her aware of a side of life in the town she had previously been

⁶¹ Statistical information was provided by The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (see Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services 1996). Data was available at an Australian level (for example, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1997a) and also disaggregated to a regional level (for example, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1997b). Statistical data was also supplied at a local level (for example, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1997c), to the Mildura domestic violence unit, which included these statistics in their annual reports (Mallee Domestic Violence Services 1994; 1995; 1996; 1997). See also Putt and Higgins (1997) for a review of research and data issues relating to domestic violence in Australia.

⁶² Other rural academics I met in Australia were surprised by the apparent 'radicalism' of the CWA ladies in Mildura, and one told me 'you've hit on the only radical CWA group in the country.'

unaware of. She said that she had been 'woken up' to some unpleasant aspects of life in her home town:

I guess it [Nydia House] woke me up. I got educated. I had heard some things, but now I know things go on. My feelings about the place [Mildura] have changed since then. I feel more a part of it, and more aware of that whatever part you live in, wherever you are, certain things are happening underneath: I didn't know that before.

In interview other respondents stressed the importance of the development of the unit in enabling women to seek help. In particular they said that the introduction of the sexual assault unit (linked to the domestic violence unit) had played an important role in assisting older women to deal with unresolved issues about violence and sexual assault in the past. One respondent told me:

Although there was a need [in the past], people weren't aware that those sort of things were happening to us. Now they can come up with some figures. A lot of those things were hidden you know, especially sexual abuse and whatever. A lot of older women are saying 'that happened to me,' and there was no recognition of it before then. There was no help. I don't know which comes first—recognition or people talking about it. A lot of people are relieved to be able to come out and say 'that happened to me.' And now to [also be able to] ask for help to get out of a situation before something drastic happens.

I was told by another respondent that by introducing a vocabulary for public discourse in Mildura which did not ascribe blame to the women involved in situations of domestic violence, the unit had to some extent enabled women to recognise that they could speak up within their households to try and change their husband's behaviour.⁶³ For example, one respondent said:

⁶³ In this respect the domestic violence unit was regarded by some as a site of resistance. On this kind of development, Westlund writes: 'because they use a marginalized group's experiences and testimony to destabilize oppressive norms, battered women's shelters and grass roots anti-domestic violence programs are subversive in their activities. The central disciplinary practices of well-run shelters play a key role in authorizing survivors to speak (and be heard) in otherwise inaccessible arenas and are thus integral to the formulation and implementation of intelligible and effective strategies of resistance. Although there is a sense in which shelter programs reproduce the status quo by trying to fit women into society—and by attempting to impart the skills and knowledge required to accomplish that aim—their larger goal is to remake society and social norms to accommodate these women as autonomous individuals who refuse to submit to patriarchal norms of violence against women. Indeed, I argue that such anti-domestic violence programs constitute local sites of resistance, in something very like the Foucauldian sense' (Westlund 1999: 1056-7).

If I was a battered wife, well I believe they are ashamed of it, and if others were talking, were speaking up, I think well, maybe I could speak up, and get out too. You'd be more inclined to stand up for yourself. In that way it's good that it is out in the open.

The unit's promotional work had also encouraged women to identify and 'name' their experiences as domestic violence. One domestic violence worker told me that women 'don't put domestic violence' on having a blacked eye, being yelled at constantly, or not being allowed to go out. She thought that the unit had attempted to enable individual women to reflect on and categorise such experiences as domestic violence.

Women Talking About Domestic Violence in Mildura

In relation to domestic violence, Wearing comments that 'silence is often survival. The silence of a battered woman is a wall of resistance. It is often effective protection, but it also keeps other women removed from the truth' (Wearing 1996: 2). In Mildura, however, women were not silent about domestic violence, but discussed domestic violence in a number of different ways discussed below, notably through veiled speech and the discussion of the experience of anonymous third parties. Critically, these different ways of talking around domestic violence enabled the women whom I met to discuss violence without necessarily revealing a personal experience of abuse, and thereby identifying their husbands or members of their families as perpetrators.

When discussing domestic violence on a pragmatic level, respondents asserted that they knew it to be wrong and inappropriate in principle, however, in practice they accepted that domestic violence was an unavoidable part of the Mildura *habitus*. When I asked one of my respondents why domestic violence seemed to be such a problem in Mildura, she replied 'is it particularly bad here? It's a universal problem, and a Mildura culture.' While other individual respondents emphasised the importance of education and the capacity for every individual to make changes in their life in relation to violence, others took a more prosaic view, and said it was not something that 'could be fixed' in Mildura.

Corrin suggests that 'women's Groups throughout the world have been successful in different ways in challenging patriarchal claims and images of men's violence against women as being somehow 'natural' and neither criminal or systematic' (1996: 22). However, in Mildura, women told me that the prevailing 'redneck culture' meant that men who were perpetrators of domestic violence were not ostracised by other people.

Furthermore they said that the normalisation of violent behaviour in young boys—the understanding that 'boys will be boys'—extended to low expectations of adult male self-control. As noted below, and in Chapters Four and Seven, this led to some extent to an acceptance of domestic violence as a 'natural' male *disposition*; and to an understanding (based on pragmatic experience) that resistance to the normalisation of male violence was a futile gesture. One respondent commented:

I don't think really it's anything that can be fixed. I think it's an attitude problem more than anything, on violence within the families and stuff like that. Talking about it and getting people to acknowledge it, that's one thing, but it's not necessarily going to change it. That's got to come from within the people themselves. Even if they're brought up differently and don't have any problems as a child, then a man still can bash a woman ... I think that's just something that's inherent in society, I don't think it can be really changed, and I don't know how it can be dealt with.

Another woman who had worked in the Mildura domestic violence shelter told me:

Kids come in even from a young age, and that has to be the worse thing you see. You get a three year old boy screaming at his mother—we had one with his mother cowering in a corner, and he was yelling, I couldn't believe the power the child had over the mother. Imagine his power. He completely controlled his mother, and I could imagine him growing up. You are seeing kids—8 or 9 year old boys—and they are so violent already and copying their father's behaviour. The way they are treating the mother ... when some of them come in it's like she leaves one violent situation and comes into refuge, and has another perpetrator with her. It's very common.

When I asked respondents whether they felt that it might be possible to change attitudes of younger men, perhaps in their twenties and thirties, no one was optimistic about the potential for change amongst men who were already violent to their partners. One experienced rural domestic violence worker emphasised violent men's reluctance to change, principally because the men in question saw no reason or motivation to change their 'accepted' and 'acceptable' behaviour patterns. She said:

I don't think you can change them at that age. I don't agree that you can. Everyone can if they choose to. I don't think they choose to, or ever would choose to.

Thus domestic violence was represented to me as a part of life to be accommodated rather than challenged, as the cultural milieu of Mildura had 'so predisposed them [men] to using violence that they do not necessarily recognise that there is anything wrong with demonstrating their strength or self-worth or power through assault' (Guberman and Wolfe 1985: 10).

In reflecting on public discussion of domestic violence, Corrin has observed that:

Public discussion of violence has been a key feminist campaign so that much of the hidden, privatized nature of male sexual violence can be overcome. In this context the old adage 'knowledge is power' is appropriate, certainly in terms of challenging myths. When women experiencing male violence have no opportunities or spaces in which to analyse and better understand the structures which engender and/or encourage the situations in which such violence occurs, developing strategies of resistance is made more difficult (Corrin 1996: 9-10).

As noted above, in Mildura there did not appear to be a taboo on speaking about domestic violence, but the opportunities and spaces for discussion of domestic violence in public were often carefully crafted discussions of third parties, whereby women discussed the work of the shelter in helping unspecified 'women in trouble.' There were ambiguities in these discussions, as these tended to focus on 'strangers,' 'on the run' or 'running away' from abusive situations. For example, one respondent repeated in interview comments she had made in public regarding the importance of women using the shelter to be able to make a break. She said:

It's definitely helped awareness ... women stayed in those situations before because there wasn't any way out for them. They didn't know there was help available. With a bit of publicity, they've been able to make a break and get out of those situations.

Public discussion of such issues was therefore conducted *as if* women did not know men or women involved in these situations, and *as if* the women on the run were strangers to them. However, the women speaking to me would have been aware that the more routine work of the shelter was dealing with women who were leaving, and then returning to, abusive partners in Mildura.

The domestic violence workers in Mildura stressed that this phenomenon was a common feature of the experiences of women with children in situations of domestic violence, who often wanted to 'keep their families together,' but critically, also wanted their violent partners' behaviour to change. One respondent summarised what she felt was a common situation in Mildura, by saying:

The biggest thing is, most of them, they love their partner, they just want their behaviour to stop. And in the ideal world if that stopped, everything would be okay. So that's why they all keep hoping it's going to change ... they go through the cycle of violence where it's an explosion, the honeymoon after, and then it starts building again. And they just hope that it's not going

to happen again. Obviously, most get pushed to the point where until the violence is actually life threatening, they don't take that step to get out.

The domestic violence workers I met, also emphasised their willingness to reach out and support women each time they sought to leave situations of abuse, and to support them without judgement if or when they chose to return to their partners. However, this cyclical pattern, was the source of some misunderstanding within Mildura, leading several men and women to comment to me in conversation that if women returned to their violent partners or husbands, then clearly the situation 'couldn't be that bad' at home.

I was also told that the economic realities of life for women in Mildura meant that women leaving domestic violence situations often had nowhere to go, and no economic resources to fund their 'escape.' One respondent asked, 'if you want these people [women] to make changes, you have to look at what are we asking them to give up, and what are we asking them to put in its place?' As discussed below, without assistance from other economically-independent women in their family, it was very difficult for women at risk to even consider making changes in Mildura.

When women talked about personal experience of domestic violence in private or during an interview, they often used veiled speech to refer to the content of the character of their abusive partners, male members of the extended family, or son-in-laws. Violent relatives were often referred to as 'a bit of a twerp' or 'a toad.' Also, understated comments such as 'her first husband was not much use to her' allowed the dissatisfaction felt by one mother towards her former son-in-law to become apparent, without explicitly referring to the violence that he had inflicted on her daughter.

However, respondents were also prepared to speak directly to me of their own experiences of domestic violence with remarkable candour, and to recount personal narratives on this issue in diverse situations. For example, one day I was being given a lift to a craft event by one of the most elegant of the CWA ladies, and on the radio the news came through of a man on the run from police in the relatively near Swanhill area. The man was a farmer who had shot his wife and other members of her family, and was now believed to be heading north towards Mildura. I looked out of the car window and joked that we should be looking out for a man with a shotgun popping out from the vines. The CWA member said 'absolutely,' and recounted how her family had been threatened with a similar fate by her former son-in-law, and how she had dealt with it. When the driver finished her account, she turned into the car park, picked up her craft basket, smiled radiantly and

said how much she was looking forward to the crafts and the luncheon. After this I noticed that in public whenever I mentioned the importance of domestic violence work in Australia, she was one of the CWA ladies who would make an affirming comment to say how important it was to help 'women in those situations' and to raise awareness of the issues. However, under no circumstances would she be expected to identify herself, or a member of her family, as one of 'these women' in public.⁶⁴

Changing Representations of Domestic Violence in Mildura

Respondents often discussed with me the ambiguities in the changing representations of domestic violence in Mildura. The popular understanding and representation of rural men's *disposition* towards violence meant that respondents told me that in Mildura it was commonplace to think that 'a few slaps' within a relationships was something women should expect; and that they understood that more broadly, there was a perception in Mildura that being hit by your husband was 'no good reason to break up the family home.' One woman told me that when she was attempting to raise an incident of domestic violence with a local doctor in the early 1990s, he had asked her 'what do you want me to do, am I supposed to break up the family?'⁶⁵ This respondent suggested that whilst the domestic violence unit had changed some attitudes, the difficulties surrounding challenging representations of what was appropriate behaviour within the privacy of the family would, in her view, be insurmountable in Mildura.

In an attempt to change these types of attitudes and representations in Mildura, the domestic violence unit and some women I spoke to aimed to promote a public discourse around the concept of domestic violence as a criminal offence, and to create an understanding of women experiencing domestic violence as 'victims of crime.' One woman commented that if 'after a while people [victims of domestic violence] start to accept that they are a victim of a crime like anyone else, they realise they don't have to hide.' This

⁶⁴ Abu-Lughod comments on the comparable use of poetry in Ali 'Alwad. She writes: 'it is clear that individuals are shielded from the consequences of making statements and expressing sentiments that contravene the moral system if they do so in poetry. By sharing these "immoral" sentiments only with intimates and veiling them in impersonal traditional formulas, they even demonstrate that they have a certain control, which actually enhances their moral standing' (Abu-Lughod 1986:248).

⁶⁵ It was suggested to me by some respondents that much of the alcohol abuse and prescription drug dependency amongst women in Mildura was a symptom of domestic violence. However, some asserted that (predominantly male) medical practitioners still preferred to simply deal with the symptoms (alcohol or drug abuse) rather than the cause (domestic violence).

was linked to the unit's work of attempting to encourage women to remain in their own homes, and to remove the perpetrator (rather than themselves and their children) from the scene of the crimes. In practice, I was told that since women were not encouraged (particularly on the blocks) to think of themselves as having a stake in the family property or home, this rarely or never occurred.⁶⁶

Although the unit carried out excellent work, most respondents said that the public discourse had made only a small impact on the quotidian realities of domestic violence in the domestic sphere. Respondents told me that there was still a dissonance between the hopeful public discourse and private realities regarding women's abilities both to challenge the acceptability of male violence, and to seek legal redress. For example, one day during fieldwork Krystyna and I drove over to Andrew's block to sort through some old boxes which Andrew wanted to clear from the farm shed. Krystyna pulled a medical plaster-cast out of one of the boxes and said it had belonged to her daughter Naomi. She told me that some years ago, when Naomi was fifteen and had been on the block together with three of Andrew's female relatives and his male cousin, the cousin had been teasing Naomi and attempting to touch her breasts. Krystyna said that Naomi had said she would kick him in his crotch if he carried on, and that Naomi had waved her fist at him. On hearing this, in front of the three women and Krystyna, Andrew's cousin lost his temper, grabbed Naomi's fist in his own hand and crushed her fist until some of the bones broke. The women were stunned and rushed Naomi to the hospital. Krystyna called the police and reported what had happened, but when a court date was set to prosecute the cousin, it coincided with plans for a rare family holiday, and Andrew and his mother-in-law (who blamed Naomi for 'provoking' Andrew's cousin) persuaded Krystyna and Naomi not to seek an alternative date and to drop the prosecution. Krystyna told me that the cousin was not reprimanded by anyone in Andrew's family, and continued to work on the block during harvest. In this, and other similar situations I heard about, I was told that in Mildura it was viewed as expedient by men, and some of the women thirled to them, to blame the victim. One respondent said:

If you blame the victim, you blame the most vulnerable, and you can clean the mess up real quick. Because you bury it.

⁶⁶ The displacement of women out of the family home in Mildura, should they offer resistance to the patriarchal arrangements, offers an interesting contrast to Gullestad's observations on divorce in Bergen. She comments 'that motherhood is central as both role and identity is demonstrated in cases of marriage crisis and divorce. Mother is central in the home and father is the one who is "thrown out" or has to leave' (Gullestad 1984: 132).

Likewise, another respondent reflected on the process whereby young girls such as Naomi, became apprenticed to the idea that women were in some way responsible for male domestic violence. She said:

Part of domestic violence is also making that person feel less of a human, dehumanising it takes the self esteem away. Every piece of their being is assaulted. They don't feel good about themselves. Even when they tell someone it is happening, they are told it is their fault anyway by person who is doing it to them. And they start believing it. If you're told something long enough, it's hard to break from it.

Events such as the one above supported some respondents' views that experience had taught them that the law did not punish male perpetrators of domestic violence in Mildura and that as Corrin observes, 'if crimes of violence were against other groups than women, they would be responded to differently' (Corrin 1996: 6). For example, a respondent told me how a police officer responding to a call for assistance following an incidence of domestic violence in Mildura had advised the alleged (male) perpetrator which lawyer he should contact for the best legal advice. My respondent said the police officer did this while helping the injured wife into the back of his patrol car.

Other women told me that it was difficult to seek any sort of legal remedy against violent men in Mildura. One respondent asked me what women in Mildura would learn from cases where, for example, a well-respected man in Mildura with a history of domestic violence had driven his car into the garage door trapping his wife between the car and the door, breaking both her legs. He claimed it was an 'accident' and no legal action was taken. The respondent concluded:

When the police aren't standing up for you, it's sending back a very powerful message ... the police then can't understand why they [women] go back [to violent partners], what they don't know is that they go back because the bastard is in their minds, and he is controlling them.

Fear and Domestic Violence in Mildura

Whilst the notion of promoting women's ability to live without fear in their own homes in Mildura was supported by respondents, they said that in practice *fear of what might happen* was a major issue for women living with men who had violent tendencies.

Some respondents suggested that fear was inculcated as part of the domestic violence cycle. One respondent told me:

Domestic violence is something that gets into your psyche, and you don't get rid of it for a long time. The person gets totally into their psyche, into their every thought. It's such a psychological game these bastards play. It gets to be a way of life for them. They forget the real world. There is no safe place for these women, because they can hear him in their heads, and they know he's out there, and they know he's looking. I've even had it said to me that it's now their normal way of life. They don't feel they've got a way out, this is going to be the way their life is going to be. That's really sad.

For some women, fear of what might happen was incorporated into their everyday *practice*. For example, when I stayed with Krystyna, after several weeks of living in a caravan behind her cabin, she commented that I was the only person she knew who locked doors more often than she did, and that I was the only person who had stayed with her who had not commented on her practice of locking her front and back door when she was working at home. As I live in the city centre in Edinburgh and habitually lock all house and office doors and windows, it had not occurred to me that what I was doing was at all unusual. Conversely, Krystyna's security consciousness was linked to her concern about some recent unannounced visits from Andrew. It was notable that when I moved to live in suburban Mildura my male housemate immediately commented on my propensity for what he viewed as completely unnecessary door locking.

Women said that fear of male violent male behaviour was also amplified by fear of guns. Respondents talked to me about the relationship between guns and domestic violence, and whilst many women repeated the truism that it was 'the person not the gun' that inflicted damage, as with the CWA lady above, respondents spoke with me about the intimidation and fear caused by men threatening them directly or indirectly with firearms. The literature review commissioned by the Rural and Regional Women's Unit also comments:

Guns are a prominent presence in rural life in a way not equalled in metropolitan settings and this is a factor increasing women's vulnerability ... Much of the literature points to the threat or actual use of firearms as a significant reason why women did not risk fleeing or seeking help ... Firearms are believed to play an important role in explaining the disproportionate number of domestic violence related homicides in rural and remote areas (The Women's Services Network 2000: 16).

Krystyna was clearly concerned about Andrew's gun collection, and even after Andrew handed in one of his guns during the federal gun amnesty at the end of 1996 (following the Port Arthur Massacre) Krystyna was sure that he had a second gun hidden on the block.

She told me that it was this second gun that Andrew used to 'let off steam' by shooting into the small area of scrub on the block. During harvest the year before I arrived in Mildura, Krystyna told me that she and Andrew had argued, and that she had gone to walk around the block to allow them both to regain their composure. There were wwoofers staying at the time and after the event they told Krystyna that Andrew had suddenly emerged from the house with a shotgun, saying that he had heard that here was an intruder on the block. He had jumped onto the farm bike, and driven off in the direction of the scrub at high speed, where moments later they heard him firing into the scrub. Hearing the shots, Krystyna hid where she was on the block until Andrew rode back to the farm house, where she later returned to find the ashen-faced wwoofers on the verge of calling the police. Andrew did not mention this to me, but as noted in Chapter Five he often repeated to me, and the other wwoofers on the block, the story of when his grandfather shot an intruder on the block. During the economic depression of the 1930s a starving man had trespassed on to the block and been eating grapes from one of the vines. Andrew narrated that his grandfather had shot the man, and that he would do the same should he find someone stealing from the block.

Respondents also spoke to me about the fear of involving themselves with women who were attempting to address issues of domestic violence, for fear of the repercussions for themselves or their family. Several respondents questioned what they could realistically do to help women in difficult situations, in the knowledge that women frequently returned to violent partners and attempted to resume a normal life. Individual respondents told me that they felt that their direct intervention would place them in a difficult situation when the family (the man and woman, perpetrator and victim) in question began behaving 'as if nothing had happened.' I was also told by respondents that the same fear of involvement was apparent in any consideration of intervening in child abuse notification. Respondents suggested that in Mildura there was a common sense shared understanding that parents 'have the right to raise their children as they see fit' (Manning and Cheers 1995: 395) and that child abuse should be handled within the town (ibid. 1995: 395). Fear of indirect or direct retaliation from the accused parent also deterred individuals from becoming involved in such issues.

Even when women had overcome the obstacles to leaving violent partners, I was told by respondents that women were afraid of using the law to their advantage, and that it was commonplace for husbands to continue a campaign of intimidation throughout the legal process associated with separation. One respondent commented that from the outset in the divorce process, women in Mildura were easily intimidated by their husbands' unfounded

assertions over custody claims, and were afraid to leave, and stay away from their husbands, because they were told they would lose custody of the children. One respondent said:

A lot of the husbands and fathers, they hold it over the mother. You know, they'll say you know, 'if you leave me you'll never see the kids again. You know I've got the money, I've got the power, I can have the best barristers, you've got nothing.' And the women do believe it.

However, another respondent emphasised that such husbands did not generally want custody and care of the children, they merely did not want disruption to their domestic routine. Therefore she concluded that women should not be afraid of such oratory. This respondent told me that on the rare occasions when women were bold enough to leave the children with the father, such fathers simply could not cope with caring for the children and returned them to the mother after a short period of time. In the light of her work supporting women's rights in Mildura, she said:

The things that they [women] come in and tell you. You know like, 'but he says he'll contest custody of the kids.' I say 'give him the kids, they'll be back on your doorstep in a fortnight or less,' you know what I mean? The mindset in the women is that 'I don't own anything, and I'm not worth anything' ... the statistics show that three years down the track if the wife gets custody and leaves, this bastard won't even have regular contact. Most women just panic, and men treat the children like property—the government decided the children shouldn't be treated like property, so now we say 'contact and residence,' but we haven't got rid of the problems.

During interviews, several respondents also asserted that the nature of the legal system in a small town like Mildura meant that women were disadvantaged in Mildura due to gossip and misinformation influencing (predominantly male) lawyers attitudes to women clients. In addition, several respondents asserted that rural lawyers, in general, tended to have very 'traditional' attitudes towards a woman's place in society and therefore they favoured a conciliatory approach, rather than ensuring women obtained their legal entitlements. In dealing with the law during the separation process, one respondent told me whatever the letter of the law said, in practice, what was dealt out to women from the tightly knit male dominated rural legal networks was a 'a quick fix, country style,' usually in favour of men.

Despite the establishment of the Murray Mallee Women's Legal Service as a federally-funded initiative to promote access to justice in north-west Victoria, changing attitudes to women's legal rights was seen as a major challenge in Mildura by the Legal Service and by

my respondents. One respondent commented that the information had to be 'in women's heads' (with the associated wish to use this information) rather than written down; and that the process of giving women the confidence to use the law was a process that had to begin in the education system. Another respondent added:

These sorts of changes take a long time. First of all you've got to get the women to have confidence in the lawyer, right? Because no matter what the lawyer says, that bastard will be in the background telling her different. Right, so you've got to get them to trust you, then you've got to try and get them to educate their daughters. That's it. It's changing them, and then having them to pass it down the generations.

Despite the fighting talk above, respondents also said that experiences of using the legal services available to them in the event of contested child custody, had not inspired confidence amongst vulnerable women. A rural women's activist from outwith Mildura said:

The court has to decide what's in the best interests of the child. Unless your husband can prove in a court of law that you're a heroin-taking prostitute, the kids are yours.

However, in Mildura, one woman told me that she lost custody of her child to her husband after his lawyer persuaded the rural court in another Victorian country town that she was a 'drug user,' due to her having friends who smoked cannabis recreationally, and her unorthodox hairstyle. Two of Krystyna's friends also told me that when Andrew and Krystyna had been separated, Andrew (they assumed on his lawyers advice) had approached them and asked them to testify that Krystyna was a 'drug user.' They both told me that they thought at the time that this was a ludicrous suggestion, and had quizzed Andrew, who they said did not appear to know what sort of alleged 'drugs' he was asking about.

Issues of intimidation and access to justice were amplified in situations where women attempted to leave a blocky, and respondents told me that women attempting to leave were usually pressured by his family members into not claiming against the family block.⁶⁷ However, if women did not make a claim against the property as part of a divorce

⁶⁷ For example, when Krystyna sought a legal separation from Andrew in 1992, under pressure from Andrew not to force him to sell his 'grandfather's block,' Krystyna arranged a settlement which gave her what she had brought into the property: A\$13,000 and a car. Krystyna took the family sedan car, which Andrew subsequently replaced to reduce his liability for child support (see Chapter Five). Rather than paying Krystyna a lump sum of A\$13,000 which she could invest, Andrew then paid the money back to Krystyna in A\$50 dollar bills, at times of his choosing, over the next four years.

settlement, they often found themselves without adequate income to support their children. I was told that despite assurances made by husbands prior to divorce, farmers and blockies commonly submitted their income as nil to the relevant authorities who assessed their liability for child support payments after divorce. One respondent commented:

I think the biggest problem for women in country areas is that they grew up to believe that they didn't own anything. So therefore when you say to a rural woman, 'you know, excuse me, you can have half this farm,' it's 'oh no, no, no, his father, and his grandfather, because it's passed down you know, oh no, I couldn't.' It doesn't matter if I've worked on that farm, you know, seven days a week for the last 20 odd years and he's drunk every penny that's ever been made, and beaten the crap out of me, 'you've got to understand, it was his father's.'

Issues about farm women's access to justice have also been highlighted in other research, notably Leipens (1996) who comments:

Taking Foucault's (1990, p.101) connection between discourse and power, past legal treatment of farm women can be seen as a discourse which is simultaneously an 'instrument,' an 'effect' and a 'point of resistance' against power which has frequently rendered farm women's work as insignificant and their status as inferior. The movement's actions have thus tackled the means by which such legal discourse is socially constructed. Their negotiations with federal Ministers have then resulted in a process of reconstructing that discourse (Leipens 1996: 238).

On a more positive note, some respondents discussed ways in which it was possible to work around local circumstances to assist women in leaving situations of domestic violence. For example, one respondent told me that she opened a bank account that the rest of her family was not aware of, and skimmed money from her own salary for a year to enable her sister to be able to afford to leave her husband. This provided the economic independence for her sister to make a break, and to set herself up independently in her own house in Mildura.

The premature death of a violent husband also appeared to be a positive and socially acceptable way for women to be released from situations of domestic violence. Death appeared to cleanse all previous faults in men, and I was told on several occasions that even the most violent of men were valorised after an early death. Respondents said that once dispatched behind the glass of a framed photograph above the television, even the most oppressive husband was transformed into a devoted and much missed family member. This left his widow to enjoy the comparative freedom of respectable widowhood, and

imagine the individual as if always like this idealised and formal display (Okely 1994a: 51-52).

Krystyna's Story

Never, ever, can you abandon a child without crashing into perdition yourself. It is a rule against which one personally can do nothing.

Peter Høeg, Borderliners

During fieldwork it soon became apparent that in a town where giving a brief synopsis of a person's life story as an addendum to the question, 'who's that over there?' was usually a matter of course, the silence surrounding Krystyna was remarkable. When people asked me where I was staying, I usually said 'with a milliner out on 15th Street.' Although many people knew that this was Krystyna, they generally replied with a non-committal 'oh.' If I added that my host used to be married to Andrew Jones, people occasionally said 'oh yes, the Joneses.' In the context of the constant exchange of social information in Mildura (see Chapter Two) their marked reticence was extremely informative.

The silence encapsulated the tensions and ambiguities between the biography of Krystyna provided by Andrew and my allegiance with Krystyna. For the people who knew Andrew's version of Krystyna's biography circulating in Mildura, it did not make social sense that someone like me (an educated visiting academic) would be staying with the person Krystyna was alleged to be. I found Krystyna's testimony to be more persuasive and coherent⁶⁸ than Andrew's oratory, but the personal narratives relating to the diagnosis of Jesse as a child with Asperger's Syndrome illustrate the relative 'weightiness'⁶⁹ (Weiner 1991) of women's testimony and men's oratory, and the skill with which men's oratory was deployed in Mildura.

⁶⁸ As referred to in Chapter Three, Krystyna's life story and personal narratives did not 'fulfil the criteria of substance and coherence which are necessary to establish the credibility of the person in his/her autobiography' (Roos 1989: 27) in Mildura.

⁶⁹ 'Words that are perceived to be the "truth" about past events and historical or mythical circumstances are similarly thought to have values of weightiness. In certain cases, these words are considered rare in that they are secret, guarded knowledge. When such words are spoken in a public setting, they reveal the nature of a present relationship by exposing the "truth" about past events. The disguise of "truth" must also be accounted for in these situations. The "truth" is being created anew in the telling or the giving, as an individual elects to hide or expose her or his private thoughts or feelings as well as the complete circumstances of past events' (Weiner 1991: 163).

The narratives discussed in this section of the chapter also serve as an illustration of the fate of women who offered resistance to the patriarchy in Mildura. In 1944, McIntyre and McIntyre observed that it was the migrant women, or women who had worked away from home and returned, who were willing to strive for changes in country towns. They wrote:

In one medium sized town we were told: 'The women who grew up here and have never been away are settled in their own little groove and never look beyond it. *It's the newcomers or women who've been away and earned their own living and come back, who see the need for improvement and work for it* (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 186 emphasis added).

Fifty years on, Dempsey observed that 'all challenges are sooner or later unsuccessful' (Dempsey 1990: 279). In his writing (notably 1990 and 1994) he provides a bleak assessment of the prospects for dramatic change in country towns in rural Victoria. He comments:

It is not surprising that many of the younger women report that fear of being branded a poor mother, an ungrateful wife or an aggressive or rebellious 'bitch' in a community where they want to continue to live and be accepted stops them doing anything more than complaining to close friends and fantasizing about public challenges to existing inequalities. In addition, they are aware that sanctions can be swiftly invoked against their children and spouses. Clearly the possibility of spouses and children being sanctioned sets up a serious conflict of interest for women which inhibits them from challenging the system. In particular, if they attempt to appropriate men's advantages, they risk publicly humiliating their husbands for failing to control their wives (an important norm in Smalltown) which in turn places at risk the affective aspects of their marriage relationship, possibly the well-being of their family, and the marriage itself. This would be a high price to pay for women whose sense of identity and personal as well as social esteem is based in large measure on their roles as wives and mothers, especially when it is borne in mind that such women are dependent on their husbands financially and socially (Dempsey 1990: 294).

However, taking a different perspective on this issue, I am interested in Okely's assertion that women who put up a fight and eventually lose are showing momentary resistance to their fundamental subordination, rather than showing submission and evidence of autonomy and complementarity (Okely 1996: 210). I was particularly interested in Krystyna's narratives because, as discussed in Chapter Three, I agree with Okely who suggests that the fragmented resistance of individuals 'informs us of the power of structures of subordination' (Okely 1996: 231).

I met in Krystyna a woman interested in resistance, and a woman whose marginal voice both challenged the centre and showed its form (Okely 1996: 214), an issue also emphasised by the Personal Narratives Group:

Personal narratives of nondominant social groups (women in general, radically or ethnically oppressed people, lower-class people, lesbians) are often particularly effective sources of counterhegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoint embedded in dominant ideology as particularist rather than universal, and because they reveal the reality of a life that defies or contradicts the rules. Women's personal narratives can thus often reveal the rules of male domination even as they record rebellion against them (Personal Narratives Group 1989: 07).

Krystyna had fascinating personal narratives, which offered what Okely describes as instances of 'intermittent resistance' (Okely 1996: 212) about a life in Mildura and a sense of a cultural and personal hinterland stretching beyond the confines of the town and levees.⁷⁰ Like McBeth writing about her interaction with a native American woman, Essie Horne, my interest in Krystyna's personal narratives 'was a result not only of our friendship, but also because I believed ... [she] had lived her life convinced of its importance' (McBeth 1993: 148). Part of this importance was her resistance to gender inequality and, at the time I met her, a commitment to the task of testimony in relation to her son Jesse's life.

My interest in the tensions between Krystyna's personal narratives and testimony, and Andrew's 'oratorical biography' (Angrosino 1989b: 323) is also in how Krystyna's personal narratives, the life story of a migrant rebellious woman, was obscured so completely by Andrew's alternative reading and re-telling of her life. Informing a consideration of these tensions, Schaffer argues:

Australian women, migrants and homosexuals as well as Aborigines are likely to take up a variety of oppositional stances in relation to those received cultural codes of meaning. None of these 'others' will escape, however, being implicated in their relationship to the dominant Australian masculine economy (Schaffer 1988: 13).

I would argue that in his re-telling of Krystyna's biography, Andrew used this dominance and utilised 'formulae, metaphors and implicit remarks ... aware that his audience shares

⁷⁰ I would suggest that Krystyna's intermittent resistance exemplifies of Roos's assertion that 'only when people become aware that their common situation is not inevitable, that it is a result of human actions that deny them decent standards of human treatment, only then do rebellions occur. Otherwise the only reactions to oppressive situations are escape and evasion' (Roos 1987: 9).

the knowledge and assumptions upon which his message is based' (Comaroff 1975: 153), to deny coherence to Krystyna's alternative version of what happened. Carr observes that:

Central to the analysis of stories and story-telling, apart from the temporal unfolding of events, is the relation among the points of view on those events belonging to the characters in the story, the teller of the story, and the audience to whom the story is told (Carr 1986: 5),

and Andrew's dominant position within the Australian masculine economy was strengthened by his own identity as an unpretentious 'battler.' Andrew fitted comfortably with representations of a 'real Australian,' a national type which does not exist, but

Nonetheless, the idea of his existence is given status and value within culture. According to Australian cultural codes which have become common-sense knowledge, if he did exist he would come from and preferably live in the bush, of poor but honest Anglo-Irish stock. He would be unpretentious, shy of women, a good mate and a battler (Schaffer 1988: 8).

In Mildura, it was therefore relatively straightforward for Andrew to discredit a foreign woman's account of what happened (see also Chapter Three) and for Andrew's stories to be viewed as credible and coherent in the Mildura *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977). Critically, Andrew's narratives also had cultural coherence, which as Linde notes 'may be analyzed independently of the truth or falsity of the particular events, characters and feelings that are used to constitute the story' (Linde 1993: 16). His narratives were also reinforced by common sense understandings of the world in Mildura, which as Linde writes, are:

The most persuasive and invisible coherence system ... the set of beliefs and relations between beliefs that speakers may assume are known and shared by all competent members of the culture. As a system, common sense is transparent within its culture: it consists of beliefs that purport not to be beliefs, but to be a natural reflection of the way things really are (Linde 1993: 222).

Shuman comments that 'narratives do not recapitulate experiences; they convert experiences into a story' (Shuman 1986: 157), and the tensions between Andrew's and Krystyna's narratives show, following Shuman, that the 'relationship between text and context ... [operates] on three temporal levels: the description of the past situation, the immediate storytelling situation, and the ongoing situation' (Shuman 1986: 24). Similarly Carr observes that:

Fictional stories do not represent reality because what they portray by definition never happened. But it is often thought that stories can be life-like precisely by virtue of their form. That is, *they are capable of*

representing the way certain events, if they had happened, might have unfolded (Carr 1986: 13 emphasis added).

In this way, because Andrew shared narrative understanding with his audience, he represented himself as acting accountably and intelligently (Carrithers 1992) and created persuasive narratives structures which I would argue were 'structures derived from the telling of the story itself, not from the events it relates' (Carr 1986: 10).

Likewise, Gullestad has observed that 'a life story is shaped by ... deeply embedded notions and expectations about what constitutes a culturally normal life' (Gullestad 1996b: 07), and whilst my understanding of Krystyna's narrative was that it was coherent (Roos 1989) and a 'good story' (Gullestad *ibid.*), in Mildura her life was not 'culturally normal.' Andrew's social circumstances gave him the entitlement (Shuman 1986) to compose Krystyna's biography, but because 'a coherent narrative is not something which can be created by the narrator at will *but something which is only possible in certain circumstances*' (Roos 1989: 28 emphasis added), as we see below, in Mildura, it was never possible for Krystyna to create a coherent autobiography. The influence of Andrew's biography, and the refusal of other people in Mildura to accept the authenticity of Krystyna's autobiography, was a fundamental part of Krystyna's subjugation as a foreign woman in a rural town. However in this case, as with the Lindy Chamberlain case (see Chapter One),

It is not the 'reality' or the 'facts' of the case which deserve closer scrutiny but the modes of representation which enabled the population to read the events according to pre-existing systems of meaning (Schaffer 1988: 65).

Andrew began to tell me Krystyna's story as soon as I arrived at his block, using a series of tropes which 'by demanding attention, thought, and evaluation ... if interesting and effective, become weighty and may seductively enter the listener's mind' (Weiner, 1991: 175). In doing this, Andrew attempted to persuade me as the listener, 'how to think about the matter' (Weiner 1991: 179) of Krystyna's biography. During the first week I worked on the block, we spent several days planting up vines, the first phase of which involved digging up vines that had been heeled into the ground, soaking them in a water butt and then selecting vines to take over to the uncultivated section of the block to plant. Talking over the water butt, Andrew asked me if I took drugs. When I told him I didn't and started to talk about how much I disliked cigarette smokers, I would suggest that just as 'when an Azande employs *sanza*, the intent is to release one's own "nasty" thoughts about someone, without that person understanding the meaning of what is being said' (Weiner 1991: 167),

Andrew interrupted me to tell me that both Krystyna's daughters were 'drug users' and said that Krystyna 'doesn't seem to mind,' and that she had been a heavy smoker before she had Jesse, and now was 'addicted' to coffee. Thus Andrew began his account of his 'difficult' wife's life which he used to 'impose order and causality upon reality' (Shuman 1986: 21), and which was compelling, persuasive and for Krystyna and Jesse, ultimately, dangerous.

In contrast to Andrew's narrative, Krystyna often told me of her sadness about the way things had worked out with her marriage to Andrew, as she had been passionate in her commitment to the land, and farming organically (see Chapter Six). After Jesse was born in 1988, Krystyna told me that Andrew refused to help with, or pay for, Jesse's childcare; and due to problems in the marriage, Krystyna left Andrew's property twice to live in rented accommodation in Mildura between 1990 and 1992. However, Jesse's behaviour as an infant and toddler was difficult to deal with, and during both separations Krystyna found the strain of caring for Jesse on her own too much. On both occasions, she therefore returned to the block looking for support, and hoping that Andrew would provide more practical help with Jesse. At this time, Krystyna said she knew she need help dealing with life with Jesse, and turned to a counsellor, a locally influential psychologist (who I was told by others at the time of fieldwork had allegedly gained his qualifications through a correspondence course). He charged high fees, and Krystyna told me that over a course of sessions which cost A\$1,200 in total, and were highly personal and intrusive, he concluded that Krystyna had problems rather than Jesse; advised her when she was living in rented accommodation that she should 'return to her husband'; and told her that 'her problems' were based on her fear of losing her good looks as she aged, and jealousy of her daughters maturing into beautiful young women.

This left Krystyna lacking in confidence and unsure what to do. However, in 1993, when she left the block for a third time and was living in a rented house in Mildura, she took a holiday on her own to Queensland during the winter, to get away from the stresses of life in Mildura. She took a car boot full of hats to sell, and when she was exploring the Brisbane area, she went to some market stalls on the Sunshine Coast and almost sold out of her stock of hats. Krystyna said that everyone was fighting over the hats, and suddenly, at that moment, Krystyna said she realised that there was a life to be lived outside of Mildura. Krystyna then explored Queensland, observed the people there, and colours and designs began flashing through her mind together with images of hats she wanted to create. She then returned to Mildura, put most of her possessions in storage, and made

plans to move with Jesse to Queensland, plans which she discussed with Andrew, but which he did not appear to take seriously.

Krystyna told me that at that time, a male wwoofer had arrived to work on Andrew's block. She said that at first she thought he was good company for Andrew, but when he spent A\$700 on toys for Jesse, Krystyna became suspicious about his motives and his identity. By contrast, Andrew was thrilled by the man's generosity, and told Krystyna she was ungrateful. However, the wwoofer then asked Krystyna's daughter Naomi to be a driver for his drug dealing activities. When Krystyna heard about the drug dealing aspect of the wwoofer's life, she reported the man to the Drug Intelligence Agency, who in turn asked Naomi to co-operate in the man's arrest. Krystyna also immediately told Andrew about the man's drug dealing and refused to allow Jesse to go to the block while the man remained on the property. Meanwhile, Andrew then went straight to his new 'mate,' and told him what his 'crazy wife' was saying. The wwoofer then promptly stole money, a gun, ammunition, a car, and other valuables from Andrew's block, and said he was going to kill Krystyna. Krystyna said she feared for her life, and using the domestic violence unit services fled to New South Wales, and then to Queensland to a women's refuge.

Although Andrew never discussed this incident with me, he told Tobias (an East German wwoofer) that a wwoofer had once 'let him down' and stolen a car from him. Others told me that Andrew had been furious about the theft of his property and about Krystyna leaving Mildura. He immediately initiated legal proceedings against Krystyna, claiming that she had broken custody agreements. He told the police and lawyers that Krystyna had run away to have an adulterous affair and that she taking drugs—assertions which Krystyna later forced him to legally retract.

The Federal Police were compelled to act, and traced Krystyna to the Queensland refuge where Jesse, aged five, was forcibly removed by the Federal Police and returned to Mildura. Andrew applied for legal custody, and as the criminal wwoofer was still at large, Krystyna did not contest the order, and remained in Queensland on her own feeling both emotionally and physically exhausted. From then on, in Mildura, it was widely believed that Krystyna was a 'foreigner' with a drug problem, who had abandoned her husband and child to pursue a hedonistic lifestyle in Queensland. This resulted in people

In Queensland, Krystyna lived alone for a year making hats. One day during fieldwork, we wired up Krystyna's video camera to the television and watched home videos taken in Queensland. In contrast to the visibly wearing effect caring for Jesse was having on her in Mildura, in the video she was happy and relaxed. During this time, a friend in Queensland suggested she should sell her hats at folk festivals and so Krystyna established her own company—*Hotpotch Ecowear - from practical to outrageous hat designs*—and found that her hats sold very well, and drew attention from both the media and performers at the music festivals she attended.

However, Krystyna told me that she knew all was not well in Mildura, and after one of Jesse's visits to Queensland, Krystyna rang the school guidance officer because she thought Jesse was showing signs of distress. The guidance officer's girlfriend had been in the opposing group of feminists involved in the divisions at the women's shelter in the late 1980s, and it was made known to me during fieldwork that, influenced by his girlfriend's narratives about the dispute, he had formed an intense dislike of Krystyna. He immediately told her that she was 'inventing' problems because she wanted to regain custody of Jesse, but when Krystyna emphasised that she was only concerned with Jesse's well-being and not interested in contesting the custody order, the guidance officer was compelled to report the matter to Health and Community Services. They then asked for Jesse to attend a session with the local child psychologist in Mildura (who also happened

⁷¹ Although at first I thought Krystyna might have been exaggerating about the extent of sanctions or 'shunning' in the town, throughout fieldwork it was clear that the reputation created by Andrew's oratory clung to Krystyna through almost all of her social interactions. For example, when the Arts Festival Exhibition opened at the Arts Centre, I decided to attend on the assumption that there would be free flowing high quality Australian wine on offer, and Krystyna thought that it would be nice to go out for an evening. Krystyna put on a cow-skin trilby and dressed smartly, but I was dressed down in jeans and a t-shirt. When we arrived I tasted the different wines, and wandered among the crowd, and Krystyna who was driving, drank orange juice and looked at the exhibits. Later when we stood together, she told me who everyone at the opening was, and commented that although she knew most of the people there, 'of course,' no one was talking to her. We then went back to the bar, and I asked for another glass of wine, and Krystyna also asked for a glass of white wine. The woman behind the bar passed me a fresh glass of wine from a tray of full wine glasses behind the bar, but then picked up a wine bottle and poured wine into Krystyna's orange juice glass. We both stood and stared at the wine mixing with the remnants of juice, and orange pith floating in the glass, and when Krystyna asked for a fresh glass, the woman sighed and then reluctantly passed her a clean glass of wine. This contrasted dramatically with the reception Krystyna received at the folk festivals. When we visited Maleny at New Year, women and men, who had known her during her time in Queensland, or from other folk festivals, called out her name and ran to embrace her.

to be the *only* locally available psychologist, and the man who had previously counselled Krystyna). He refused to discuss the results of his sessions with Jesse with Krystyna because, he said, she did not have legal custody of the child. Later, during my fieldwork when Krystyna attempted to find records of the sessions, she was told by the school staff that all relevant files were 'missing.'

The sessions with the psychologist did not improve Jesse's behaviour, which Krystyna's friends told me was out of control, ranging from general disruption in school to stabbing other children with scissors. Andrew had refused to take Jesse to any appointments with the local paediatrician arranged by the school, and until this time, Andrew had told Krystyna on the telephone that Jesse was coping and not missing his mother. However Krystyna told me that Andrew finally admitted that Jesse had been sobbing inconsolably, and asking for his mother to return, and Andrew admitted to Krystyna that he 'was not coping.' After one phone call when Jesse rang Krystyna and told her he was alone all the time and that there was no one to look after him, Krystyna felt compelled she said, as a mother, to return to Mildura.

On her return, Andrew handed over Jesse without any legal proceedings, on the condition that Krystyna lived no further than four hours drive away. Krystyna then moved to Hepburn Springs, some distance south of Mildura, and continued to support herself through her millinery business and government welfare. The primary school in Hepburn Springs advised her that there was something wrong with Jesse beyond being a 'naughty child,' but medical practitioners in Hepburn Springs blamed his behaviour on what they told Krystyna's was her 'volatile lifestyle' and 'family dysfunction.' Krystyna told me that she found it difficult looking after Jesse on her own in Hepburn Springs, and one day when feeling low-spirited she telephoned Andrew who told her that Jesse needed both his parents close by and that he would help her financially with the care of Jesse if she returned to the block. Reassured by Andrew's promises of assistance, Krystyna therefore returned to live on the block at the end of 1995. Andrew's mother was relieved that Krystyna had returned to Mildura, but told her that she was 'very disappointed' in what she understood her behaviour had been, and seemed to expect Krystyna to again take on the role of a 'blocky's missus.' After a short spell of living on the block, however, Krystyna realised that she and Andrew had different expectations of what was involved in 'sharing a house in the best interests of Jesse,' and she bought her cabin and moved to live 2km down the road from the block.

In the meantime, as Andrew had not attended appointments to assess Jesse's behaviour in her absence, when Krystyna returned to Mildura she made an appointment with the paediatrician. In November 1995, Jesse was diagnosed as a child with Attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity and prescribed Ritalin (see Green and Chee: 1995). After the diagnosis, Jesse was referred to the mental health unit of the local hospital and Krystyna requested a consultation with a child psychiatrist. The hospital told her that she had to meet with social workers first, who would determine whether Jesse should see a specialist, and she was told that this was the only process which could lead to Jesse being referred to a child psychiatrist. Jesse then had several sessions with an inexperienced social worker who also interrogated Krystyna about her life. A case meeting was held in Mildura, and the social workers who would undoubtedly have been following the versions of Krystyna's story circulating in Mildura⁷² with interest, decided that social workers rather than a psychiatrist should deal with Jesse; and Krystyna was told that she was 'more in need of help than Jesse.' The social worker dealing with Jesse's case told Krystyna that it was his view that Jesse's problems related solely to 'family dysfunction,' and not a medical condition. Krystyna told me that she was devastated by this experience and felt that there was no one else she could turn to for help.

During his first year at school, when Krystyna had been in Queensland, Jesse undertook a WISC (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) Test (Wechsler 1949 and 1974), the results of which were 'missing,'⁷³ However, due to his ongoing problems Jesse was given a second WISC Test in late 1996 during my fieldwork in Mildura. The same guidance officer as mentioned above administered the test when Jesse was medicated with Ritalin, designated Jesse as a 'borderline' child, and when telling Krystyna about the results of the test, said to her that Jesse would grow up to be a 'good blocky.' When Krystyna asked

⁷² For example, one day when staying on Andrew's block, I went to the travel agent in Mildura to enquire about ticket prices for an internal flight within Australia, and the woman behind the desk recognised Andrew's telephone number, and told me that she had handled the bookings for Jesse's flights when Krystyna lived in Queensland. She wondered out loud to me where Jesse was living now? I said he was back with his mother, living out near Irymple, and she said how interesting it was to hear that, and what a nice child Jesse was. When I relayed this encounter to Krystyna several days later, she said the woman knew exactly where she lived, as she had been in talking to the same woman with Jesse the day before I had been in the travel agency. However, she was not surprised to hear that someone was looking for clarification of news in Mildura, and told me that when she was in the travel agency the woman had ignored her and not acknowledged that she knew Jesse.

⁷³ Like the records of Jesse's sessions with the psychiatrist, when Krystyna requested the files regarding Jesse's first WISC test, she was told by school staff that the relevant files were missing from the school filing system—it appeared that they had been removed and not returned.

the officer about her concerns about some of Jesse's extreme behaviours, he told her she was being 'too controlling,' and that Jesse would be better off with his father, running around on the block, than with her. He suggested that she should give Jesse an axe and encourage him to chop wood to release some of his excess energy. After spending days with Jesse at home, and spending time with him at school (where the difference between Jesse and his classmates was clearly apparent), I found it difficult to understand how an eight year old who could neither read or write, and who struggled to colour in, or cut out shapes, and who had the language skills of an inarticulate toddler, could effectively be described as a 'borderline' child.

Andrew's narratives and quotidian oratory about Jesse simply being a 'bit of a handful' were validated by the guidance officer, and when I was working on the block Andrew often told me that there was nothing wrong with Jesse. Even though the primary school refused to admit Jesse unless he was taking Ritalin, Andrew appeared to see Ritalin as something Krystyna used to sedate or 'drug' Jesse, and often spoke of when Jesse would take over the block, as if he was a child without a disability. It may be that Andrew found it difficult to contemplate a future without being able to hand on the family block. Inhetveen comments that:

To give up a farm, apart from the normal generational change, means not only giving up a prospect for the future, but also giving up a family story and biographical continuity, and a cosmology centred around the idea that a person who has a farm will survive not matter what happens (Inhetveen 1990: 104-105).

Among other issues it was perhaps his sense of self-preservation that motivated him to deny Jesse's condition.

After only a few days of living at Krystyna's cabin, I told her that I thought Jesse was not going to 'grow out of' whatever it was that was wrong. Boosted by my confirmation and validation of her experiences, Krystyna rang the paediatrician and asked for an appointment to seek a referral to a child psychiatrist. I accompanied Krystyna a week later to the appointment, but when Krystyna tried to explain Jesse's problems in depth, the male paediatrician immediately agreed to increase Jesse's Ritalin dosage,⁷⁴ and also

⁷⁴ Attwood notes that medication can be used with Asperger's Syndrome, however, he writes 'it is only a temporary measure and children and adults with autism and Asperger's Syndrome are particularly vulnerable to the long-term side effects of medication prescribed as a sedative, especially the antipsychotics. Medication can be valuable but must be prescribed to meet specific signs, and be reviewed regularly, and be of short duration' (Attwood 1998: 164).

prescribed Melloril (a tranquilliser which Jesse was to be given to sedate him during the night). He said that as Krystyna had exhausted the services in Mildura, he would refer her to a child psychiatrist in Melbourne. Krystyna said she was concerned about Jesse missing doses of Melloril if he was staying overnight at Andrew's place, and as I recall it, the doctor said this would not be a problem. However, when I read the instructions on the packet when we were back at Krystyna's place, I read that it was critical not to miss a dose. As Krystyna carried on talking about other things that were concerning her, I watched as the paediatrician tried to close down the consultation, sitting back in his chair, looking down at his watch, and closing Jesse's file. He then made a final response that Jesse was probably 'yes, borderline intellectual disability' which left Krystyna sitting on the edge of her chair, hands clasped together, gasping for breath, in stunned silence.

At that moment, I felt that the paediatrician had not given a satisfactory response to Krystyna's request for a referral, and so leant forward, raised my voice, and asked 'so when can Krystyna expect a referral date?' At the time, I was wearing cut off denim dungarees and bludstone work boots, but my accent caused him to recoil, and he looked alarmed, stared suspiciously, and said it would be a matter of weeks. Outside in the car Krystyna was still gasping for air, and said that was the first time anyone had said to her that Jesse might have an intellectual disability. After it was confirmed that Jesse had been referred to a child psychiatrist in Melbourne, Krystyna contacted the paediatrician again, and asked him to write a note supporting her application for respite care. When the local social work agency received the note they showed it Krystyna as a matter of routine, and she saw that all that the paediatrician had written was 'the mother can not cope.' He had made no reference to the diagnosis of ADDH, the prescribed medication or to the referral of Jesse to a child psychiatrist.

When writing the report for the child psychiatrist with Krystyna, I stressed the transformative power of the written word to Krystyna, and encouraged her to engage with bureaucratic process to ensure an accurate diagnosis. However, during fieldwork I also recognised that despite gaining knowledge about Jesse's condition, there was little Krystyna could do to change or resist her predicament in Mildura. For example, when I started helping at Jesse's school once a week, the class teachers told me that they did not know that Andrew and Krystyna had split up; did not know that Jesse was living with his mother; and seemed unaware of issues relating to ADDH and Jesse's medication. This was despite the fact that the Head Teacher refused to admit Jesse unless he was taking Ritalin, and that Krystyna had been into the school to tell them about Jesse's

circumstances and health problems several times, and had provided photocopies of books and articles on ADHD. Throughout my fieldwork, the teachers often said to me how 'lucky' Krystyna was to have me staying with her so that I could 'tell them what was going on.' Even after all the diagnostic tests, and the confirmation of Asperger's Syndrome, at the end of fieldwork I went out for dinner one evening with Jesse's class teacher. At the end of the meal she turned to me and asked 'do you think it's really just a problem with discipline at home?'⁷⁵ When this event occurred I was reminded of the visitor to Mildura who told me that in Mildura when in conversation with 'foreign' women, it was not that people in Mildura could not hear, it was that they were not listening (see also Chapter Three).

Significantly, after Victoria's leading child psychiatrist had diagnosed Jesse as a child with Asperger's Syndrome, the guidance officer at first said to Krystyna that he did not know how he had managed to miss the diagnosis. He seemed contrite⁷⁶ but later said it was not his job to assist in obtaining special needs education for Jesse, and refused to co-operate with the psychiatrist in Melbourne. At that point I had moved to the Mildura suburbs, but during a visit with Krystyna I rang the education authority to ask if Krystyna could deal with another guidance officer due to the problems she was encountering. They said that this was her right as a parent, and Krystyna then sent a letter to the authority stating why she felt it was inappropriate for the guidance officer to continue working on Jesse's case, and set out clearly that this was a confidential matter. She subsequently found that the letter was read out at a meeting attended by the guidance officer, who denied the validity of Krystyna's version of events, and as a result was allowed to continue working as Jesse's guidance officer. I was astounded by this chain of events, but Krystyna said she was not surprised and that this was normal in Mildura.

⁷⁵ Despite the medical evidence, the teachers in the school appeared to have problems coming to terms with Jesse's diagnosis. I found McIntyre and McIntyre's (1944) comments on this issue informative, notably the apparently enduring view in Mildura that children's mental health problems could be regarded as 'naughtiness.' McIntyre and McIntyre's write 'there is no regular testing throughout schools for mental retardation, which often appears as 'naughtiness' or 'laziness,' and we know of no schools in these towns which have opportunity grades for retarded children. Testing, treatment and advice in home and school handling of such children is one of the specialist services lacking throughout country towns' (McIntyre and McIntyre 1944: 137).

⁷⁶ Attwood writes that 'children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) are often considered as having some characteristics indicative of Asperger's Syndrome. Although they are two distinct disorders, they are not mutually exclusive and a child could have both conditions' (Attwood 1998: 22).

It appeared that the people I met who knew Andrew and Krystyna found it almost inconceivable that an Anglo-Celtic blocky's son could have Asperger's Syndrome. Likewise, Andrew initially accepted the diagnosis, but then changed his mind. I would suggest that a factor in this decision may have been that if Andrew recognised Jesse's condition, at that instant, he would also be denying the coherence of his own oratory, and validating Krystyna's testimony. To acknowledge publicly Jesse's condition would be (as Weiner comments of 'speaking the truth' in the Trobriands) to be saying 'hard words.' She writes:

Even though the truth about something may be known to everyone, saying the truth publicly exposes all the compromises and negotiations in relation to the truth under which individuals operate in their daily lives. For this reason saying "hard words" is perceived to be extremely dangerous and produces immediate and often violent repercussions ... From this perspective, "hard words" are weighty, carrying the ability to penetrate the personal space of others (Weiner 1991: 167 emphasis added).

Therefore, soon after the diagnosis, Andrew was reprising his suggestion that all Jesse required was 'more bedtime reading to help him catch up at school,' and Krystyna said that she was afraid to publicly or privately challenge Andrew—to speak the 'hard words' regarding the 'truth' of Jesse's condition—for fear of the repercussions. For, as Brenneis and Myers observe:

Where social relationships are seen as problematic and requiring work to maintain and create, one should avoid "hard words"—irreversible public facts (Brenneis and Myers: 1991: 17).

For Andrew and the broader community in Mildura it was much easier, and more comfortable, to understand the common sense (Linde 1993) interpretation of Jesse's behaviour as the result of the influence of his foreign and, according to the Mildura rumour mill, licentious mother, rather than his Anglo-Celtic blocky father.⁷⁷ After Jesse's diagnosis, Krystyna spoke again about moving to Queensland, this time to access specialist treatment for Jesse at a Clinic managed by Dr Tony Attwood. Andrew, however, was not happy with this idea, and on returning from a visit to Andrew's block, Jesse announced they would not be moving to Queensland because Andrew had said the only way Krystyna

⁷⁷ Paradoxically, Asperger's Syndrome is thought to be inherited. Attwood comments that 'Hans Asperger (1944) originally noticed a ghosting or shadow of similar characteristics in the parents (particularly fathers) of the children he saw, and proposed the condition could be inherited ... Unfortunately, some parents will refuse to acknowledge the syndrome, as to do so means that they must accept they share the same condition' (Attwood 1998: 141-142).

was leaving Mildura was if she was dead. After that event, Krystyna sought legal advice, and then spent several weeks staying at the women's refuge in Mildura. The police visited Andrew and also spoke with me about Jesse's safety and well-being (but pressed no charges). Krystyna then returned to her cabin and went to court to seek the right to leave Mildura with Jesse, without Andrew's consent.

Krystyna was represented by a female lawyer living in Mildura who, it seemed, prioritised finding a consensus view between the two legal practices involved in the case, and Andrew was represented by one of the town's 'leading' male lawyers. When the case reached the court, a court officer with no knowledge of Asperger's Syndrome provided what Krystyna thought was an inadequate 'family assessment' by spending less than half an hour with Jesse, Krystyna and Andrew before the hearing. Krystyna's concerns about child safety and welfare issues were then dismissed by Andrew's lawyers as a 'stunt' and 'false allegations.' After agreeing with Krystyna that he would provide evidence, at the last minute the paediatrician decided he was not prepared to make a statement to the court about Jesse's medical condition. According to Krystyna this was because he decided that he would not be able to comment on whether Jesse required specialist treatment outwith Mildura. The result of the hearing reinforced the common sense (Linde 1993, Schaffer 1988) interpretation of the situation, and therefore Andrew was granted *increased* contact hours with Jesse, and Krystyna was refused permission to leave Mildura. In short, it appeared that the court had decided that the mother was 'not coping,' and the father was 'doing his level best' to deal with a difficult foreign woman, and her influence on his child.⁷⁸

Before the court hearing Andrew had again approached Krystyna saying he just wanted to be 'a family' again, but very much on his terms: a relationship perhaps as Gullestad suggests of 'dependence masked as sharing ... [whereby] a man is in fundamental ways dependent on a woman for emotional sustenance and even for a coherent and 'whole' sense of the self' (Gullestad 1992:91).

⁷⁸ Gilmore comments on a woman's ability to be *heard* and *believed* in a hostile legal environment in relation to the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings in the United States. She writes: 'although the law professor Anita Hill told her story in a quasi-legal setting, she was unable to be heard as a truthful subject by the inquisitorial senators. Even though she passed a lie detector test, a truth-divining apparatus that is controversial at least in part because it takes the final call on truth telling out of the hands of human authority, Hill could not be "believed" by the small group of men in a position to judge ... As this incident showed, the multiple locations of truth within a culture often collide with a single location of the law, and it is frequently a hostile place without justice for those whose lives and experiences do not coincide with the preexisting standard for judging truth, eliciting justice, or provoking mercy' (Gilmore 1994: 224, emphasis added).

After this, Krystyna knew that she would have to seek a court hearing in Melbourne, supported by legal aid, to secure the freedom to leave Mildura. However, in the meantime, aware that the cost of legal proceedings would be ruinous to Andrew's finances, a member of Andrew's family approached Andrew's mother and warned her that Andrew risked losing thousands of dollars in legal costs. Andrew's mother then held a crisis meeting with Krystyna during which it was revealed that she was under the erroneous impression that Krystyna had never worked on the block, and had been entirely supported by Andrew throughout their separation. After that meeting, Andrew's mother spoke to Andrew, and he then dropped his legal opposition to Krystyna leaving Mildura.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on how women come to terms with domestic violence and intimidation through personal narratives. The chapter has illustrated that the introduction of the domestic violence shelter in Mildura challenged representations of family life in Mildura, but has also shown that ambiguities remain. These relate to the dissonance between women's descriptions to me of the shelter providing a sanctuary for women 'on the run,' and the reality of the shelter providing a space to allow women to leave, and then return to, violent husbands or partners in Mildura. The chapter has also discussed the pervasiveness of fear in the quotidian experience of domestic violence.

Krystyna's experience of attempting to obtain a diagnosis for her son as a child with Asperger's Syndrome is an example of the power of men's oratory over women's testimony, and illustrates the consequences of women's resistance alluded to in other writers' accounts of life in Australian rural communities. In particular, this episode illustrates the ease with which a man was able to create a coherent and persuasive narrative to explain the meaning of what happened, and the strategic way in which this narrative was deployed in order to destroy the credibility of his wife's testimony.

Chapter Eight now returns to the national context to reflect on how this ethnography can contribute to a discussion of the interaction between the state and national policy discourse and the everyday realities of rural women's lives.

SECTION III

So you're hanging out in the ocean & the first wave of feminism has gone & the second wave & who knows how many other waves. It's dead flat & you find yourself thinking, Feminism - who needs it?



Plate 11. Judy Horacek cartoon from *Women With Altitude*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

USING OUR STORIES TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE? RURAL WOMEN IN NATIONAL POLICY DISCOURSE

Rural policy isn't something they make up—it's about us telling our stories and using our stories to make a difference.

*Anne Dunn, Women in Agriculture and Resource Management Forum.
Canberra, April 1997*

Women are involved at a government level. But ultimately what they really need is, they need a country woman to run Government for a while and we'll sort out a few problems.

Respondent in Mildura, July 1997

This final chapter provides a short reflection on how this ethnography can contribute to a discussion on the interplay and interface between policy discourse and the quotidian realities of rural women's lives. The chapter reinforces the already stated (for example Leipens 1996: 51) concern over the appropriation and direction of the policy-driven national discourse on rural women, and illustrates some of the tensions between the femocrats within the civil service—attempting to embed rural women's interests within the Howard Administration—and rural women's activists. The Women in Agriculture and Resource Management (WARM) Forum is used as an illustration of what respondents described as a 'bureaucratic moment,' which amplified activists concerns that there was, at the time of fieldwork, little room on public platforms for women who were not 'economically successful' rural women. The chapter also describes the local perception of rural women's policy amongst women I met in Mildura; ethnography of the WARM Forum and some reaction to the Forum; and brief observations on the possible impact of the changing public discourse on rural women's issues.

During fieldwork, when discussing how rural women's issues had been adopted by political parties in Australia, one respondent (unaware of the role of femocrats in the civil service and the role of the rural women's movement) asked me 'how do these things come to the attention of politicians? It's a miracle I suppose?' I would suggest this is a relevant question, because as discussed in Chapter One, the issues that were drawn to the attention of the federal administration by civil servants and activists; and which were consequently incorporated into policy development, set an agenda for action, funding opportunities, and concomitant change, in rural communities. In contrast to the social justice programmes of the mid 1980s to early 1990s which aimed to improve the status of women, some

respondents suggested that the 'new agenda' for rural women supported women engaged with successful economic development which complemented men's interests; but sought to subordinate women attempting to be successful in their own right. Rural women's activists whom I met at events such as the WARM Forum, like Okely, argued that it was essential that rural women were not 'charmed into the comfortable conclusion that women are equal but different' (1996: 207). Raising issues which are particularly relevant to the presentation of women's labour at the WARM Forum (see below) Okely writes:

Women's productive yet different participation in a gendered division of labour is not evidence of equality. Despite the conclusions of a brilliantly detailed historical study (Segalan 1980), an alternative reading reveals that relations between French peasant women and men are marked by political, economic and ritual asymmetry, but the form of that subordination changes (Okely 1996: 229).

Some activists (see below) at the WARM Forum felt that rural women's concerns were being incorporated into the interests of the economic rationalist objectives of the Howard Administration. I would agree that the Administration's persuasive and seductive emphasis on gender complementarity at the Forum did mask issues of gender inequality in rural communities discussed in previous chapters. However, it is a credit to the skills and ingenuity of the femocrats within the Howard Administration, and the rural women's activists, that what some women said was a orchestrated effort to 'bore' the resistance out of the delegates at the WARM Forum, failed to subvert the rural women's movement agenda over subsequent years.⁷⁹

Rural Women's Policy: making a difference in Mildura?

During my time in Mildura, only the so-called 'power pussies' (see Chapter Four) appeared to have a sophisticated understanding of rural women's policy development. In interview, and during more general conversations, most women described the impact of government policy for rural women in terms of the impact of the domestic violence unit in Mildura and the introduction of breast cancer screening.

⁷⁹ As noted in Chapter One, despite fears at the time of fieldwork that the Howard Administration might terminate the Rural Women's Unit, the Unit survived and was later augmented by a Rural and Regional Women's Unit in 1999. See <http://www.dots.gov.au/rural/women/index.htm> (December 2000).

Despite their understanding of gender inequalities in Mildura, when I asked women if they were aware of the rural women's movement, or felt that policy aimed at improving the status of women in rural areas had affected their circumstances or changed their lives, most of the women suggested that they were not sure of what policy development I was discussing. Some of the women's comments were as shown below:

I've heard about rural women supporting each other—instead of being a farmer's wife, they are the farmer too. And supporting each other and being part of business and decision making. But otherwise I haven't thought about it.

I didn't know about them [rural women's groups], apart from the CWA, until I read your thing [research flyer]. I didn't know they were there. So the answer is no.

I've never seen it [*Network*], what is it? Tell me—I don't know.

No, never heard of anything.

What's it all about - you're telling me.

I had heard about it at Carwarp [a township near to Mildura]—there was a free paper [*Network*], I intended to get it, but never got it.

I don't know [if the government can help country women]. Women are still in the country, still tied to families, but I don't know how family or community can help. I have offered to baby sit for some of the young ones, but they are tied [to the children] if they want to go to something that their husband doesn't want them to go to. Someone has to be there with the kids, and it won't be their husbands. Don't see how government can help.

I've heard about it [the rural women's network], but it hasn't had any impact on my life. I haven't had anything to do with anything organised by the government. Patchwork groups are set up by women themselves, and the CWA have been going for years by itself with no help from the government. So who are they helping? Where are they?

Some women had heard of the Victorian Rural Women's Network magazine *Network* and the Victorian Women on Farms Gatherings, but they tended to have the view that the rural women's movement had made more of an impact in the dryland and Mallee farming districts than in the irrigation districts. Rural Women's activists outwith Mildura attributed this to a lack of awareness-raising amongst women in the viticulture and horticulture industries; or social and cultural differences between the ethnic groups in Mildura, and other irrigation districts in country Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia. However, as with other issues in Mildura, many respondents simply felt that 'changes for rural women,' and the rural women's movement, was something that was simply happening elsewhere, outwith Mildura and beyond the levees.

When I pursued the issue, respondents did acknowledge that the development of broader equal opportunities policies had improved the personal circumstances of women they knew or worked with. Significantly, in this context, respondents often spoke about changes introduced to Mildura by multinational companies such as *Southcorp* (a multinational viticulture wine producing corporation). Since comparable changes were not seen in locally-owned businesses, women described these developments *as if* they were a reflection of the apparently enlightened action of the individual companies promoting an equal opportunity initiative, rather than the introduction of equal opportunity policies and programmes as a result of pressure or legislation from state or federal governments.

Only two respondents in Mildura had attended Women on Farms Gatherings in Victoria, but these women felt very positively about the gatherings, and told me that they were extremely inspiring events. One respondent commented that her attendance encouraged her to keep campaigning for rural women's issues in Mildura, often in isolation. She said:

It's probably given me the encouragement to sort of keep pushing on in the wider field. When I feel like giving up, you know I feel I'm banging my head against a brick wall, and I think oh will I bother, and then it [the Gathering] sort of inspires me to keep fighting.

Other respondents told me that they would be interested in attending the gatherings, but said that they were dissuaded from travelling from Mildura, as they were concerned about their husband's activities in their absence (see also Chapter Four) or because they would be open to criticism that they had left their husbands with no one to 'look after' them.

The cautious interpretation of rural women's policy and limited understanding of how the policy was impacting on women's lives in Mildura, and the experiences of women described in the previous chapters, contrasts with the policy discourse of gender complementarity promulgated at the WARM Forum discussed below.

The Women in Agricultural and Resource Management Forum

I think the real message isn't getting through [to policy makers]. I heard you [Gill] say this the other night, and couldn't agree more—something like you'd been to Canberra and heard politicians saying what women want—but that's not what women want at all. It's only when we network and attend conferences that we realise that women don't want what they are told they want at all.

Businesswoman in Mildura, July 1997

The Howard Administration sponsored the Women in Agriculture and Resource Management Forum held in March 1997,⁸⁰ and the Forum was presented by rural women's activists and femocrats as a significant step. According to them, it demonstrated the Howard Administration taking forward part of the agenda for action endorsed by the previous Keating Labour Administration following the first National Rural Women's Forum in 1995 (see Chapter One).

Femocrats employed at a state level told me that the Forum also presented an opportunity for the Rural Women's Unit to demonstrate that despite being created by a Labour administration, the Unit could now deliver the policy and political needs of the subsequent Liberal administration. It was widely rumoured that the Unit was at risk due to proposed funding cuts across the Australian Civil Service, and therefore I was told that the Forum would be a 'bureaucratic moment' to demonstrate that the femocrats in the Department of Primary Industries and Energy, and leaders of the rural women's movement, could 'speak in a language that they [Male Economic Rationalist Liberal Ministers] could understand,' and demonstrate that they were 'Mandarins' rather than 'Missionaries.'⁸¹ With the exception of the first evening of the Forum (see below) which was compered and controlled by a rural women's activist, this resulted in many of the delegates I talked to expressing their frustration about the 'language' and the 'direction' of the Forum; but at

⁸⁰ See Department of Primary Industries and Energy (1997), for the conference proceedings.

⁸¹ 'Mandarin' is the sardonic characterization for bureaucrats: elite, inaccessible, guardians of government secrets. *Missionary* is the bureaucratic term for an uncompromising promoter of a political cause, someone who is discredited by virtue of "having an agenda." If femocrats acted like proper mandarins, especially in Canberra, they would behave as loyal bureaucrats who won the confidence of their colleagues by playing by the bureaucratic rules. They would not leak confidential documents; they would submit gracefully to a policy decision that went against their interests; and so on. In this case, they would lose the trust of the women's movement and be accused of selling out. If, however, they behaved as missionaries and fought publicly for the issues they believed in, they would lose their colleagues trust, and become ineffective in the bureaucracy' (Eisenstein 1996: 87).

the same time explaining to me that this was because 'Canberra was bureaucratic' and therefore the forum had to be a 'bureaucratic moment.'

In addition, it could be argued that the Forum also provided an opportunity for the Howard Administration to present their preferred view of rural women, and provide a steer from the Administration to the rural women's movement and activists, on the Administration's preferred course, directions and priorities for the future of the movement. Like Segalen's peasant wife, the Howard Administration's preferred representation of a rural woman was as a complementary wife, who '*as maitresse de la maison ... was a co-equal, a partner almost in the contemporary business sense with her spouse, even if sexually submissive and culturally recessive*' (Segalen 1989: xiii). However, as discussed below, this discourse of gender complementarity and economic success, contrasted with my ethnographic experience.

The Forum was convened in the seductive surroundings in the Canberra Rydges Hotel over two days between March 24th-26th 1997, with two days of Forum presentations and workshops combined with an evening reception at the hotel, and a formal dinner at Parliament House hosted by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy Minister. Approximately 200 invited participants were flown to Canberra by the federal government, and delegates ranged from rural women's activists, and past and present Rural Women of The Year to women who were deemed to have succeeded as entrepreneurs in their rural businesses. In addition, a number of women were invited who appeared to have no clear understanding of why they had been selected to attend the event. I spoke to two women who told me that they had no involvement in agri-politics, were unsure of why they had been invited, and did not know what the purpose of the Forum was. This added substance to the comments of some rural women's activists attending the Forum, who told me that they thought that the delegate list may have been 'padded' with women known to be Howard Administration loyalists with economic rationalist sympathies.

The informal reception for the Forum was held on the evening of the 24th and followed a format familiar to women who had previously attended rural women's gatherings, with music, key note speakers, and 'inspirational'—short and apparently spontaneous autobiographical accounts of women's achievements. Similar to 'contributions' at Alcoholics Anonymous meetings which are presented in 'a style developed for brief presentations ... and structured for maximum impact' (Angrosino 1989b: 30), the inspirations played an important role in constructing a sense of membership and shared identity for the women present. In particular, the inspirations at the Forum (and at the

other rural women's gatherings I attended in 1997) shared the same linguistic conventions regarding the presentation of self (Arminen 1991: 501); and like religious community narratives, the inspirational served as a source of healing and empowerment (Rappaport and Simkins 1991: 36). I would agree with Rappaport and Simkins that 'the power of these stories lies in their repetition, internalization and enactment' (Rappaport and Simkins 1991: 38). They go on to comment that in 'what is sometimes referred to as "testimony," people have the opportunity to explain how they came to their current self-understanding' (ibid.: 39). See also Leipens 1996.⁸²

Leipens also comments that 'these women's words [contained in the inspirational] are a public, but often very personal, example of alternative farming discourse and knowledge that is produced at the Gatherings' (Leipens 1996: 137), and at the end of the first evening, spirits at the Forum were high, with Ann Dunn the Forum facilitator concluding, to rapturous applause, that 'Rural Policy isn't something they make up—it's about us telling our stories and using our stories to make a difference.'

However, the mood changed on March 25th, a day which formed the centrepiece of the Forum, with a series of very structured set piece presentations, question and answer sessions, and a workshop, followed by dinner at Parliament House. The platform presentation themes on March 25th were as follows:

- The Challenges Facing Agriculture and Resource Management
- Making Full Use of Our Human Resources
- Women Contributing to Agriculture and Resource Management
- Valuing Women as Customers
- Supporting Women's Role in Industry Productivity and Decision Making
- Recognising Women as Clients in Agriculture and Resource Management
- Women Adding value in Agriculture and Resource Management

With the exception of Jill Kerby (see Kerby et al. 1996) and Fran Rowe (both veteran rural women's campaigners) speaking on the third and fourth themes above, the platform presentation and debates failed to resonate with the audience, and as the activists

⁸² Empowerment via inspirational women's voices shows that not only are speakers empowered in the naming and recognition of their words but the listeners, too, are empowered. Moreover, inspiration for the listeners is not a transitory elation, rather, participants recount how this caused an increase in their own actions (Leipens 1996: 199).

regrouped over coffee and lunch, it was clear that there was concern about both the focus and content of the programme.

Crook comments that 'there is a multiplicity of rural women's voices and it is important that they [all] be heard ... not only those [women] which are most comfortable with the demands of late twentieth-century agricultural capitalism' (Crook 1997: 62). However, during the first day of the Forum, it appeared to some of the delegates and activists that women's voices were being silenced; and that men were talking 'at' the women about key Forum themes such as *women as clients* and *maximising complementary human resources*, and about the ways in which (according to the platform speakers) economic competitiveness would bring prosperity to the family farm.

The enthusiasm of the previous evening evaporated, and it was apparent that the male speakers had all prepared their presentations using the same briefing provided by the civil servants, and had not consulted between themselves in order to avoid repetition. In effect, it seemed to some of the delegates that men who worked in offices spent the day repeating the same statistics about the number of women working on farms, to women who worked on farms. One delegate later commented to me:

You can't run two and a half hour sessions. You can't have women who are used to being outside, being active, sitting and listening, and being lectured to for two and a half hours. And I mean they kept saying it's important to hear their point of view, *but it wasn't*, I mean so much of [the Forum was] them repeating *exactly* the same thing—the same statistic about the increasing number of women in the workforce in agriculture. And what they couldn't see—and I think even Helen [head of the Rural Women's Unit] is at fault there ... [because she got her] knickers in a knot over all the grumbles—but the fact of the matter was that that whole first day was bloody boring. I was talking to ... [a rural women's activist], and she said she kept telling them 'you *can't* do this.' Why didn't they have a rural woman up there? Someone from a rural community, giving their perspective of what it was like being a farmer, and all the things that they run into—things that they're not accepted at, and how it's really difficult ... that Forum should have had some of the battles people are having.

Amongst women I discussed this with at the Forum, and at state rural women's gatherings later in the year, opinion was divided between speculation that the programme was either a spectacular error of judgement on the part of the Forum convenors; or a more calculated strategy by the Howard Administration. At the time of the Forum, several delegates suggested to me that the civil servants had made fundamental mistakes in the conference organisation. However, on reflection, other delegates later said to me that the skilled civil servants who organised the event would not have made these types of

'mistakes' and, in their view, the Howard Administration's objective for the day had been to drain the rural women's movement of energy.

Some even argued that the presentations by the men were, in effect, examples of manipulative oratory 'where overt presentation has covert ends' (Firth 1975: 42) whereby delegates were encouraged to feel that if they were concerned with domestic violence, gender inequalities, education and equality of opportunity, and access to justice; they were out of step with the contemporary (and perhaps economic rationalist) rural woman, described at one point by the platform speakers as a woman interested in hedonistic risky pursuits, who mulled over her life decisions whilst drinking *sauvignon blanc* wine.

Two speakers at the Forum, Steve Parker and Rohan Squirchuck, drew particular criticism from delegates who I spoke to, for what they felt was their manipulative oratory. Delegates said that their presentations were particularly problematic because their descriptions of *all women in general*—in fact broad descriptions of affluent, educated middle class urban women—provided the context for the discussion of Australian rural women's issues later in the day.

For example, Steve Parker, a Hewlett Packard Executive talked about what he knew. He spoke about his thirty-something women executives mulling over their career choices over a glass of *sauvignon blanc*, troubled over whether to have children or to pursue their careers, to delay childbirth, or employ a nanny. Parker provided an eloquent discussion about the concerns facing affluent urban middle class women who had the economic power and ability to make life choices on these issues. In contrast to Parker's emphasis on women's choices, one of the key issues facing rural women I met in Mildura and elsewhere was that they already 'had it all'—husband, children, work, voluntary commitments, community involvement—but what they lacked was agency, and the economic resources and power to determine their own life courses.

Likewise Rohan Squirchuk, Executive Director of Council for the Equal Opportunity in Employment, presented English omnibus survey data about changes in women's behaviours and attitudes (data about women 'in general' with no identification of class, income, or English rural or urban location), and presented a table of 'traditional' ideas and 'new and

growing ideas' supposedly held by women.⁸³ In startling contrast to my fieldwork experience, and the experiences of women I met at rural women's gatherings, Squirchuk pronounced:

If we look at women in the group aged 45+ we find that they have what we would see as traditional values, that is the family, a respect for authority, recognition that behaviour should be founded on moral codes of right and wrong and they are interested in security and community.

But women in the younger age group have different values ... What we see with these new women is not only seeing work as a source of identity, but they have less of a need for a partner ... Young women are looking for balance in their lives. They are very environmentally conscious and they seek risk, excitement and hedonism and amongst the excitement that they are looking for are things like parachuting, abseiling and rock climbing, and overseas travel. So their values are, actually, quite substantially different from those of older women (Department of Primary Industries and Energy 1997: 54-55).

Parker and Squirchuk's presentations provided a commentary on lifestyles which were unfamiliar to the delegates, and the sense of discursive dissonance between the platform and Forum delegates continued through the day. In a later session, the National Farmers Federation scheme to allocate two votes to all NFF (and state Farmers Federation) households to encourage women to become involved in agri-politics, and to take better account of women's views, was made much of by Donald McGauchie of the National Farmers Federation (see also Chapter Four). Again the emphasis was on gender *complementarity*, and on women as 'interested spouses' of male farmers rather than the organisation developing respect for women farming in their own right.

Finally, delegates' concerns about the focus of the Forum were encapsulated in an incident in the afternoon session when a woman stood up at the back of the conference room to raise a question about women and succession on farms (which had not been discussed throughout the day). She also asked about issues relating to girls being disregarded as potential farmers of the future, in effect a question about women farming in their own right and not being complementary helpmates. As she was outlining her concerns, Kim Evans—the male

83 Changes in Women's Values and Behaviours:
Traditional *New and Growing*
Family Interest in Careers
Authority Work as a Source of Identity
Moral Codes Less Need for a Partner
Right/Wrong Balance Green
Security Risk
Community Excitement
Puritanism Hedonism
(Department of Primary Industry and Energy 1997: 54)

chair of the session, comprising of a platform of three men—interrupted her and told her bluntly to 'ask a question.' Some delegates felt that this particular moment represented a critical point of failure to recognise the sophisticated ways of communication developed by the rural women's movement at gatherings, and also gave a signal that issues relating to women farming in their own right—and their right to inherit property as daughters rather than sons—were out of bounds at the Forum. The emphasis throughout the forum was on recognising women's complementary skills to promote economic success: a focus on the goodly, virtuous, economically successful, and complementary *wife*, rather than a woman who farms independently. Some delegates asserted that this was particularly problematic because as Wearing comments: 'the non-recognition of this [farm womens'] work is not only an issue of equity. It has resulted in inappropriate and misdirected policy and planning' (Wearing 1996: 65). She goes on to remark:

Women contribute substantially to agricultural production and related processing, trade and industry. Undervaluing this economic contribution has resulted in policies that are ineffective and inefficient in achieving the distributive as well as the output goals of agricultural development. Overall progress is less than optimal because of the failure to observe the part women play in the dynamics of agricultural development, and the consequent failure to utilise their potential (ibid.: 68).

This was a perspective shared by many of the delegates whom I spoke to, and they also expressed their concern that the focus on gender complementarity diverted attention from broader issues relating to the subordination of rural women. In particular, they echoed Okely's observation that such discussions of gender complementarity can be 'misread as evidence of women having power and control equivalent to that of men' (Okely 1996: 229-230).

Debate on the first day of the Forum also focused on appointments to Boards, and issues around affirmative action. At one point during the day some delegates expressed their resentment about the fact that Board members, particularly male Board members, were not selected on merit. The platform interpreted this as women expressing a desire to be selected *solely* on merit. The platform therefore only recorded that women wanted to be selected on merit, without the addendum that men should *also* be selected on merit alone. Several months after the Forum a delegate commented to me:

You're fobbed off the whole time. The prime one I think is in Canberra when they kept talking about you've got to be selected for merit, you don't want to get put on there [on a Board] just because you're a woman. *Men* don't get selected for merit. They get selected because Jo Bloggs has been a member of the party for 'x' amount of years, and he thought he missed out on getting

that last job. It's his turn ... so unfortunately, I reckon we should have actually not just looked at merit, we should have been pushing some other aspects of selection of women's involvement. That there must be other categories. There are many women with the merit no doubt, but you've got to have a balance of those people. I reckon we're actually going to make it more difficult for ourselves now because we've said this merit thing. So, my God they're going to have a minefield. They're going to be able to set these criteria that women can't meet.

An 'open mike' session on second day of the Forum enabled women to voice their concerns about the focus of the previous day, but many of the activists felt that this was too late, and that not only had the energy of the women dissipated, but that the Howard Administration was content for the Forum to close without a clear sense of purpose and direction. This contrasted to rural women's gatherings where 'the gathering would serve as a vehicle of power, where actions would support and empower participants' (Leipens 1996: 133). At the end of the Forum, one woman asked me if I had been able to work out what the Government was going to do next, and asked me 'why don't they say what they've got to say, instead of wrapping it up in long words that no one understands?'

Howard Administration supporters argued that the WARM Forum was an important event not only because it provided an opportunity for the new economic rationalist government to consult with rural women, but also because it created a platform for high profile men involved in agri-politics to formally state their support for the aims of the rural women's movement. Critics, however, asserted the Forum did not move the consensus of the Rural Women's Forum forward, and set an agenda for future action focused on supporting economically active and successful *married* farm women, rather than support for rural women more broadly. Some asserted that the conference effectively claimed that rural women were 'equal but different' to rural men, a considerable departure from the feminist principles of the rural women's movement.

Over the following six months at rural women's events I attended, there was considerable debate about what had 'actually happened' at Canberra, most notably at the Victorian Gathering in Bendigo, one week after the Forum. Several of the grass roots delegates from Victoria had taken the Howard Administration oratory at face value, and their initial responses to the Forum were gushing and enthusiastic. At Bendigo these delegates arrived toting their conference bags and effusing about both the Forum and the Government commitments to rural women.

However, as news of the style and content of the Forum filtered through to women attending the Bendigo Gathering, Marilyn Wearing, a keynote speaker at the Gathering felt moved to provide a more circumspect view of events. She commented:

It is breathtaking arrogance on the part of the government that women should be cute and grateful that they were flown in to sit and listen to men and then have a few moments to talk to each other. Women sat and listened to men telling them [women] how their lives were. We would like this to stop. It's very nice that the tax payers are paying for rural women to network, and for the networks, but men have been getting tax deductions for unpaid work for years, and we are just getting a bit of our own back now.⁸⁴

Marilyn Wearing's response was contested by several of the delegates, who were still dazzled by their preferential treatment in Canberra; but others suggested that Wearing's response was drawn from years of experience. One activist said that the Howard Administration was merely pre-empting what they feared would be the restlessness of the rural women's movement. Concurring with this view of male politicians placing limitations on the power they were prepared to consider sharing with different elements of the women's movement, Wearing writes:

I look for evidence of change in New Zealand. A speech delivered in 1994 by Jo Fitzpatrick, a member of the Labour Party executive, came my way. I read: 'Men assume power as a natural right. They are used to having it ... They give us bits when it suits them or when they think we are becoming uncomfortably restless (Wearing 1996: 42).

In relation to the interaction between government and the rural women's movement, Leipens observes that 'women's recommendations, demands and opinions are being 'managed' and at times radically reconstructed by the state apparatus involved' (Leipens 1996: 302). Similarly, women I met at the gatherings across Australia emphasised the difference between political rhetoric and political action. Whilst standing outside a rural women's event later in the year in order to talk to an activist while she smoked a cigarette, I was told by the activist how 'marvellous' it was that the Government had made a commitment to rural women's issues in Canberra, as if the power of the spoken word of politicians had some magical content. Another woman, drawing on her cigarette in the darkness, however, reminded her that words were meaningless in politician's mouths: what she wanted was action. Likewise, Eisenstein comments that 'it was often the case that feminist activists outside of the bureaucracy did not have a clear understanding of

84 My manuscript notes of a platform response by Marilyn Wearing at the Bendigo Victorian Women on Farms Gathering, April 6th 1997.

how bureaucracy actually worked and were sometimes naive about what was and was not possible' (Eisenstein 1996: 90). She goes on to comment:

In 1994 two senior Femocrats, heads of important women's units, confided to me that, in their regular discussions with staff members, they quizzed their colleagues as follows: "Who is your client?" Those who answered, "The women's movement," or "Women," were told that this was the wrong answer. The correct answer was "You work for the Minister." Had the balance now tipped from missionaries to mandarins? It remained to be seen what use would be made of the femocratic machinery in the future (Eisenstein 1996: 203).

As noted above, is a reflection of the skills of femocrats such as Helen Board, the then head of the Rural Women's Unit—whom I particularly admired in 1997 for being the only speaker to raise the issue of domestic violence from the platform at the Queensland rural women's gathering—that rural women's issues have remained a Ministerial priority in Australia.

The National Agenda and The Local Discourse

The potential of the changing national agenda to make a tangible difference to the local discourse on women's issues was apparent to me at the rural women's gatherings and is illustrated below by two brief examples from the Victorian and New South Wales rural women's gatherings. These are worthy of mention as—again in sharp contrast to the inspirational which were such a critical part of the rural women's gatherings—I would suggest that the manipulative oratory of economic rationalist speakers at a state level served to disempower women who were already directly damaged by economic rationalism through the decrease of jobs in the public sector, and by the reduction of social services available to women for children and families (Eisenstein 1996: 196).

Many of the women at the rural women's gatherings in 1997 expressed their concern about the Federal Government's apparent sole focus on supporting and promoting the stories and profiles of economically successful rural women. Whilst they recognised the ability of such women to act as role models, many were concerned about the effect of the focus on economic success. I was told that one of the strengths of the rural women's gatherings was that women had been empowered to come to the gatherings and to discuss their problems and the challenges facing them as women: as one activist put it 'women come to these events and learn that it is okay to say these things.' However, at the time of fieldwork, some activists asserted that the 'new national agenda' of economic success and gender

complementarity was making it more difficult for women to speak freely about personal failure, non-conformity and resistance⁸⁵ at the gatherings.

For example, at the Victorian gathering in April 1997, a keynote speech was given by Judy Brewer Fischer (the wife of a prominent right wing National Party politician, Tim Fischer) which included the following remarks:

Harking back to old style services in country areas is a bit like harking back to old style farming. Doing things just because we always did it that way, no longer works. The trick I believe is to make the mind-set shift to thinking about what you really need, rather than what you are used to. Time does not permit me to talk about council amalgamations, bank closures, bus services or post offices, but my theory is the same for all. The pace of change is such that railing against the loss of institutions and buildings can be fruitless. What we need to do is to ensure where a private business or government enterprise closes, that the service it provides is not lost. *For this reason I would rather have a phone line than a train line.*

Advances in telecommunications hold so much potential for rural Australia and if we lobby for anything it should be the provision of a low cost, high quality and extensive telecommunications system. Once we have that, I have no doubt that over a very short period we will have access to a range of on line financial and business services, a standard of education, and a level of socialisation we have never had before.

Judy Brewer Fischer, Saturday's Keynote Speaker. 8th Annual Women on Farms Gathering Detailed Report Sheets, April 1997 (emphasis added)

Judy Brewer Fisher's optimistic rhetoric did not take account of the impact on women of local service closure, and she also set out her view that rural women could look to a future where the rural women's movement was no longer needed, implying that the problems identified by the rural women's movement would be solved within a matter of years. This view contrasted sharply with the views and experiences of women I met during fieldwork. For example, low income women with children had been particularly badly affected by the closure of the passenger rail line in Mildura; and Krystyna had Internet access and could download vast quantities of information about Asperger's Syndrome and Autism, but as a 'foreigner' and 'blocky's missus' had no power to challenge the patriarchy around her, or to access services (as discussed in Chapter Seven).

⁸⁵ It was my experience that the most common form of narratives exchanged between women at the gatherings were motivational or inspirational stories—notably narratives detailing episodes of resistance where women had resisted or defied the will of the their husband or father-in-law, and won. As Abu-Lughod observes, such stories 'let others know that resistance was possible' (Abu-Lughod 1990: 45).

A providential encounter in Sydney the day after the NSW Gathering also provided an opportunity to discuss the impact of the national agenda on the state and local discourse. By chance in Sydney I met a Catholic Sister of Mercy who had sat next to me during part of the gathering. Chatting over beer and ice cream in the city centre, we reflected on the workshop I had helped to facilitate at the gathering, and in particular the moment when one woman interrupted the discussion on women in leadership to raise the issue of the financial crisis on her farm and the possible bankruptcy she faced. This had opened a broader discussion about failure and crisis on the land in NSW in late 1997. The Sister said that she was astonished that, given the current climate in agriculture, it had taken until the third and final day of the gathering for some women to start discussing their serious problems, and she wondered if this was to do with the increasing emphasis on economic success by the Department of Primary Industry and Energy which was inevitably influencing the gatherings.

We then discussed the possible influence of the increased sophistication of the gatherings and the possibility that an agenda of success stories at the gathering had discouraged women from talking about their problems, or had made them feel that they did not 'belong' at the gatherings if they did not think of themselves as 'success stories,' or 'economically successful women.' She wondered if the trend towards 'dressing up' at the gatherings was 'getting in the way' of women talking about why they were there and who they were. I said I was surprised by the number of beautiful linen suits that had been worn at the event, and the Nun said that what *she* noticed was that the women wore the same suits for three days with different blouses and accessories to create a 'different look,' and that there was no need for this. She concluded that what she was concerned about was that it had taken a woman two days at the gathering to stop pretending that 'everything was okay.' As with other women I talked to, the Sister was particularly concerned that economic rationalism was driving an agenda which did not allow space within the rural policy discourse—and at the gatherings—for reflection on failure, crisis, domestic violence⁸⁶ or other social issues.

⁸⁶ Significantly, fears in relation to government support for domestic violence programmes in rural areas proved to be groundless (see Chapter One and Chapter Seven).

Conclusion

This chapter has reinforced concern over the appropriation and direction of the Australian national discourse on rural women, and has illustrated some of the tensions between the femocrats, the Howard Administration, and rural women's activists.

I have highlighted the discursive dissonance between policy development based on a chimerical assumption of gender complementarity within rural marriages, and my ethnographic experience. This is significant because the Howard Administration's preference for the policy assumption that women are engaged in work that merely *complements* men's work on the land will do little to encourage policy clients (civil servants) to seek data to inform policy development which supports men *and women* working in primary industries. As Marilyn Wearing has recognised, it is not necessarily in the interests of a male dominated economic rationalist Government (or male-dominated farmer's organisations) to recognise women's work in agriculture and resource management. She comments:

In the current political climate, new initiatives from a bureau or department of statistics must demonstrate a need by policy clients—for example, other government departments, the banking and insurance industries, business, the labour movement, the media—for the information to be produced. Since the men in power are not disinterested, and do recognise that the implications of this data [on women's work] are a threat to their slice of the pie, there is little market demand for the information (Wearing 1996: 94).

Chapter Nine now concludes this ethnography.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Change and Continuity

While living in Mildura I developed a very pragmatic approach to the inequalities between men and women in the town. On reflection I think I became habitualised to an acceptance of women's subordination, and came to appreciate women's experiential understanding of their limited opportunities for resistance. For example, one day after I had been interviewing on the south side of Mildura I had agreed to go to Krystyna's cabin to meet for coffee. As I cycled along the road I saw her car in the distance and as she approached she flashed the headlights and pulled over to the side of the road. I stopped, and she told me she was on her way in to the police station and that she would probably then have to go to the domestic violence shelter for a while. I said that was probably a good idea, and we rescheduled our coffee date for a time when she expected to be back in her cabin. Krystyna pulled away followed by a cloud of red dust from the soft shoulder and I turned my bicycle around and headed back to town. It was only when I was in the suburbs that I stopped for a moment and wondered when it was during fieldwork that I accepted as routine that women would go to a domestic violence shelter, and that meeting for a coffee could be rescheduled around this.

In retrospect I viewed the event as a fieldwork epiphany, but examples of similar practical and pragmatic approaches to gender inequality in Mildura recur throughout my thesis. In this particular case Krystyna was aware that she was protected by the law, that she could drive to the police station where they were obliged by law to be sympathetic to her plight, and that she could obtain a place for herself and Jesse at the domestic violence unit in Mildura. At the same time, however, she was conscious that for the most part gender inequality was to be accommodated rather than challenged in Mildura, and that in a fortnight or so she would be returning home after the domestic turbulence that had caused her flight had passed. When I met Krystyna on the road I had by then seen little point in railing against the injustice she was dealing with. Instead I validated her action and, three weeks later, when she was back at home I was reminding her of sources of support outwith Mildura and thereby recognising the difficulties of resisting the patriarchy in Mildura. She and I both knew what a principled stand or the feminist perspective on her situation would be, but we both accepted the realities of local *practice*.

By the end of fieldwork the contradictions and ambiguities of Krystyna's predicament were clear to me. I recognised that in Mildura it was plausible for an articulate and educated left wing feminist—well versed in the theoretical analysis of women's oppression and subjugation—to be so afraid that she would make a headlong dash from home for the comparative safety of a local domestic violence unit safe house. This interplay between feminist principles, world-leading policy to assist rural women, particularly rural women at risk from domestic violence, and local *practice* was a central theme of my thesis. I questioned at what point and in what circumstances women were able to resist gender inequality, and also explored how women at once collaborated with, as well as resisted the power of their husbands and the patriarchy in Mildura. I concluded that gender inequality in Mildura was for the most part negotiated and accommodated, and that women had a keen understanding of the risks and consequences of concerted resistance. Women's self-identification as 'survivors' and self-analysis of their situation as 'surviving' proved to be the counterpart of my analysis of them as women engaged in intermittent resistance. Therefore, although women in Mildura in *principle* had access to the necessary information and resources to enable them to challenge the local patriarchy, my thesis has explored some of the ways in which domestic circumstances and the oppressive nature of the marriage contract in Mildura in *practice* prevented them from implementing feminist ideals which were endorsed by contemporary political rhetoric.

However, my thesis has also shown that federally funded policy initiatives introduced as a result of the work of femocrats engaged with the agenda of second wave rural feminism sent persistent signals from the political heartland to the rural hinterland. The discourse of gender equality introduced through the social justice programmes of the decade prior to my fieldwork created sites for resistance in Mildura in the form of the women's community legal service and the domestic violence unit. Whilst the discourse of 'women as equals' was enervated by the Howard Administration's preference for a discourse of gender complementarity, nevertheless the sites remained together with a local profile and associated vocabulary which drew the discussion of women's legal rights and domestic violence into the public domain in Mildura. The presence of these services validated the views of those who believed that something was amiss in Mildura. However, my research has shown that the agenda for change which the appearance of these services signalled was halted at the boundaries of these sites, and met with patriarchal refusal both in the public domain and at the threshold to the domestic sphere.

Another theme of the thesis has been the exploration of how social action in Mildura civic and domestic life perpetuated gender inequality and how 'gender shock' (Eisenstein 1991) was barely perceptible in the town. Respondents expressed an awareness of change occurring for women elsewhere, however, the strength of the local *habitus* and *common sense* understandings of gender relations did not yield to these influences, and Mildura continued to be understood to be no place for a woman wishing to succeed in her own right. Only in private did respondents situate women at the heart of economic activity on the land and in the town's business community, and in public women frequently collaborated with the dominant discourse of male supremacy.

An Ethnography of Rural Women's Resistance and Alternative 'Truths'

My thesis has made a contribution to the anthropology of gender and understanding of the 'wider than agriculture rurality' (Leipens 1996: 1) in rural studies in a number of different ways. The ethnography is a feminist contribution to Australian rural women's literature and complements the work of femocrats and feminist academics in Australia. It strengthens the already persuasive case for rural scholars in Europe and North America to similarly engage with an explicitly feminist agenda for their research. This work also supports the feminist critique of the rurality debate by explicitly focusing on the narratives of women, and discussing how women's testimony and narratives were invalidated by men. Taking a more grounded approach than many of the recent post-modern rural studies, I sought to engage the reader with current social realities and problems, and to encourage a consideration of how representations of rurality affected the reading of local events rather than merely focusing on the representations themselves.

The trend to view the rural as a site of contested discourses has been superseded in my thesis by the presentation of alternative 'truths' about the life circumstances of women living in Mildura and, in particular, the life of Krystyna. Following Okely (1996) I have described how Krystyna's personal narratives both challenged the structures of patriarchy in Mildura and showed their form, and I have used her resistance as a diagnostic of power (Abu-Lughod 1990). My focus on interpersonal issues in marriage between women and Mildura blockies sought to reveal how women's work and *practice* was fundamentally affected by the marital relationship and, in particular, how domestic constraints worked against women seeking to make spaces for themselves in the public sphere. I have illustrated this through the analysis of quotidian events and recounted how items of exchange were imbued with emotion and meaning. I have showed how

exchange relationships were manipulated to men's advantage, most notably through the way in which women's work and labour was transformed into 'favours' owed to husbands thereby reproducing their dominant position in the household and family.

The ethnography has explored how women in Mildura offered both resistance and collaboration to the Mildura patriarchy. Persevering with participant observation resulted in an ethnography of quotidian *practice* revealing contingent and pragmatic acts of compromise and collaboration, which counterbalanced bolder narratives of resistance. This meant that the thesis has not romanticised resistance, but instead highlighted the difficulties of offering resistance in Mildura where women were acutely conscious of both the ways in which the family was a powerful site of discrimination, and the strategies which were deployed to 'apprentice' women to accept subservient positions within the family (Okely 1996).

My thesis therefore offers a perspective on what resistance was possible—resistance that was both fragmentary and intermittent at best—and has set out the consequences of what happened to women who threatened the patriarchal structures of domestic and civic life in Mildura. In this way the rationale for women's collaboration and, for example, the ways in which they used craft activity as a cloak of legitimacy when gathering together as women was made clear. Likewise, it showed how individual women's resistance to the disabling work arrangements on the block ran the risk of the woman being categorised as a rural woman who was 'unable to cope'—a highly critical label which would undermine the woman's self-identity as a culturally competent rural woman.

I have also illustrated the ease with which men persuaded others how to think about a particular matter by strategic deployment of manipulative oratory, and how difficult it was for women to launch effective countermeasures against these powerful words. The way in which Krystyna's version of what happened was so comprehensively deconstructed by Andrew illustrated the male mastery of the game (Bourdieu 1977) in Mildura, the way in which events were read according to pre-existing systems of meaning, and how women's testimony was denied cultural coherence.

Narrative provided a key tool by which women interacted with the complexity of their predicament and, following Okely (1996) I have suggested that this demanded that I should capture women's narratives of fragmentary resistance where I could, and record what they revealed. The ease with which women's narratives, and particularly 'foreign' women's narratives, were discredited has again highlighted the importance of

empowering women to present the meaning of what happened (McCall 1989). This thesis also lends support to the methodological approach of examining life stories within a dynamic social context: a comparison of *the life* and *the story*. Participant observation has yielded insights which could not have been revealed without persisting with an ethnographic approach, and likewise a feminist approach has been crucial in the process of revealing alternative truths about life in Mildura.

The divergence between women's and men's understanding of family life means that whilst women sought love and affection men expected (and demanded) reproduction of the social circumstances of their childhood, notably the expectation that women had a duty to 'look after' men. Likewise women were required to collaborate with the public representation as the husband as the provider for the family. Women's lives appeared to be viewed literally as being of less value to those of men—for example, when recalling the lack of reaction when Jesse injured three women through his reckless behaviour on the farm bike, could we imagine the response if Naomi had injured three male blockies in the same way? Women contested the expectation that a wife should be socially and sexually subordinate to her husband's desires, but it was notable that whilst first⁸⁷ and second wave rural women's feminism has provided a vocabulary to discuss these issues in a number of different ways, this remained a private women's discourse not suitable for the public domain.

The most important alternative 'truth' to be discussed in this thesis is the analysis of women's experiences of domestic violence. This is not a startling observation in itself since this work complements the existing literature on domestic violence in rural Australia. However, the argument that the issue of violence against women should be included in rural studies and the rurality debate is important. If we are serious about understanding the marital contract which underpins women's work and social life in rural communities it is critical that we do not retreat from considering issues of violence, sexuality and sexual power, nor turn a blind eye to the punishment of women who 'push things too far' (Dempsey 1992: 269).

A question which remains open to debate is the issue of how we deal with 'sensitive' research in the social sciences and whether we should be engaging a more pragmatic and less stigmatising approach to sensitive issues—challenging our own and our readers sensibilities, rather than silencing or censoring the voices of the victims. For example,

⁸⁷ First wave rural feminism is represented by the establishment of the Country Women's Association in the 1920s (McGowan 1997).

male violence linked to guns in Australia (and bringing the issue home, linked to alcohol in rural Scotland) is a fundamental part of rural life in some communities, and yet is viewed affectionately within representations of rurality and the rural idyll, rather than critiqued.

The ways in which rural men were able to mobilise social action to exclude and isolate women is also worthy of further investigation. In Mildura women were afraid to offer resistance because of the certainty and severity of sanctions orchestrated by men. This research leaves open the question of whether the men in Mildura who were facilitating these acts of actual and symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1977) were acting consciously or unconsciously and what drove such *practice* within the Mildura *habitus*. Finally there is the problem of why women in Mildura represented men as childlike, uncomplicated and incompetent, rather than powerful and oppressive, in their personal narratives. Whilst women recognised the complexity of their own lives they denied that complexity to men who, however, were clearly engaged in strategies to perpetuate their own positions of power and privilege.

What Happened Next?

Campbell observes that we should not rush to judgement in the course of fieldwork,

The better way is to see the process as one that moves from us to them and back again, shifting and changing like light and weather. Instead of discarding one diagnosis of 'what they are' in favour of another, pasting it on to them like a label, all of us who get involved should take the responsibility for the accounts we give of them and accept that what we say to the outside world is a result of intermingling our experience with theirs (Campbell 1995: 235).

Research of all kinds has the potential to promote knowledge and reflection, and my relationships and intermingling of experience with respondents in Mildura and further afield in Australia has continued via letters, emails and postcards since I left the field. In letters sent to me in Scotland Krystyna has told me that she left Mildura with Jesse to live in Queensland, returned to Mildura to live on the block with Andrew, and then moved from the block to live in the Mildura suburbs. At the time of writing her millinery business was thriving, but she still 'hopes for the best' for both her relationship with Andrew and Jesse's future.

At a national level, within the re-elected Howard Administration the femocrats consolidated their position and are in the enviable situation of almost taking for granted that rural women's issues will be taken seriously within departments dealing with rural and regional affairs and primary industries. Femocrats and academics from Australia who have visited Edinburgh over the past three years have expressed their astonishment when I have been unable to direct them to someone who deals explicitly with rural women's concerns within the devolved Holyrood or Westminster administrations. I would suggest that this has again set down a marker on how far the Australian rural women have travelled, and how in many ways we in Scotland have not even contemplated embarking on a journey.

Indeed on completion of this thesis and in the context of the remarkable rural women's policy and programmes at a state and federal level in Australia, I would not be inclined to conclude that any dramatic changes in services or government priorities are required in Australia to improve women's circumstances in towns like Mildura. I would suggest that we in Scotland have far more to learn from the superb work of the femocrats, Australian rural women's policy and programme development, and the rural women's activists, than I could offer in any concluding critique. However, in maintaining an interest in *what happens next* in Australia and Scotland, I would suggest that the research remains engaged with current problems, and connected to social policy.

Appendix 5: Table of 'Contextual' Respondents

List of names and organisational affiliation of contextual respondents has been removed. The names of respondents are not material to the thesis findings: respondents are not identified in the thesis and removal of the list does not affect the content of the thesis. The table was originally primarily included to demonstrate method and identify the contextual respondent sample to PhD examiners.

Excised on [date] on the authority of the convenor of SPGSC Professor Mary Bownes – approved on 04 January 2007

Appendix 7: Table of 'Life History' Respondents

List of names and profession of 'life history' respondents has been removed. The names of respondents are not material to the thesis findings: respondents are not identified in the thesis and removal of the list does not affect the content of the thesis. The table was originally primarily included to demonstrate method and identify range/social background/social content of life history respondents for PhD examiners.

Excised on [date] on the authority of the convenor of SPGSC Professor Mary Bownes – approved on 04 January 2007

APPENDIXES

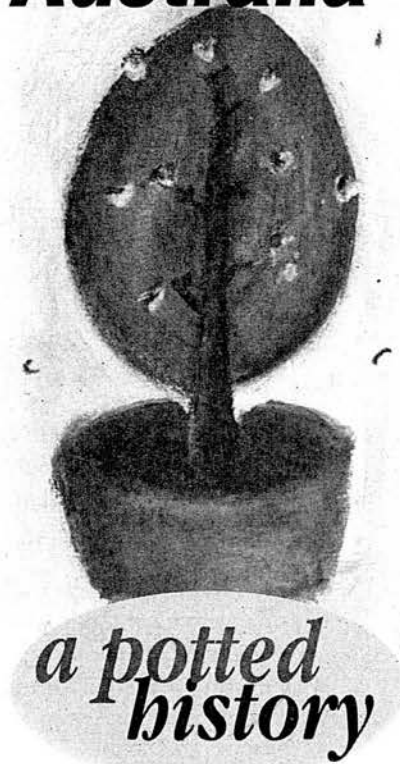
- Appendix 1 Rural Women In Australia, in *Network* Newsletter of the Rural Women's Network 10th Anniversary Edition. No. 1, 1997.
- Appendix 2 *The Sunraysia Daily* Monday June 16th 1997. Page 1.
- Appendix 3 Change and Continuity in Rural Australia. Research project flyer.
- Appendix 4 *North West Farmer* week commencing 25th August 1997, Page 4.
- Appendix 5 Table of 'Contextual' Respondents.
- Appendix 6 Letter to 'Contextual' Respondents.
- Appendix 7 Table of 'Life History' Respondents.
- Appendix 8 Letter to 'Life History' Respondents.
- Appendix 9 *Women in Bread and Wine Country* Research Findings.
- Appendix 10 *Women in Bread and Wine Country* Research Report.
- Appendix 11 Text from selected advice cards in the *National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit*, published October 1997.
- Appendix 12 Text from Mallee Domestic Violence Services information flyer, 1997.

Appendix 1

Rural Women In Australia, in *Network* Newsletter of the Rural Women's Network 10th Anniversary Edition. No. 1 1997

Rural Women in Australia

- 1979 • "The Woman in Country Australia looks ahead" -National Conference at La Trobe University.Melbourne.
- 1982 • "Women in Agriculture: Spheres of Influence" Melbourne conference.
- 1984 • Women in Agriculture groups and workshops developed statewide through the Victorian Department of Agriculture.
- 1986 • Office of Rural Affairs established and the Victorian Rural Women's Network.
- 1987 • First edition of NETWORK, the (then) quarterly newsletter of the Rural Women's Network was published.
- Farmgate learning, a Federally funded program run in Benalla.
- 1988 • Worker employed to research the relationship between farm women and the Victorian Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (DARA) in the north east region.
- Women on Farm Skills courses developed through the Department of Agriculture in West Gippsland in partnership with a community education provider and the Agricultural College. This model was duplicated in other areas of the State.
- 1989 • DARA appoints two part time Project Officers Women in Agriculture, to work with extension staff to modify programs and service delivery to actively include women as clients.
- Rural Women Sharing Change, Gippsland. An initiative of the South Gippsland Farmers' Support Group, supported Rural Women's Network and the Department of Agriculture.
- 1990 • Department of Conservation and Environment appoint project worker for "women's participation in natural resource management".
- CONSERVE, the women's environment network is established.
- Inaugural Women on Farms Gathering held in Warragul.
- PROCEED community education provider appoint a Women in Agriculture worker.
- Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture (VCAH) appoint Women in Agriculture project officer.
- Office of Rural Affairs appoints an adviser specific to work with Women in Agriculture.
- 1991 • Farm Advance, a community based group assisting families in North Central Victoria, appoint a Women in Agriculture coordinator.
- Rural Women's Network Reference Group establishes an associated Women in Agriculture Working Group.
- Sealake Women on Farms Gathering in the Victorian Mallee.





a potted history

- 1992**
- Establishment of the NSW Rural Women's Network.
 - Victorian statewide meeting of Women in Agriculture, decides to develop an organisation for Women in Agriculture, and supports the concept of progressing an International Conference for Women in Agriculture in 1994.
 - Various days for rural women across Victoria and the development of groups such as "Farmreach" and "Farmlink" are ongoing.
 - Numurkah Women on Farms Gathering in Northern Victoria
 - Working Group to develop the International conference for 1994 convened.

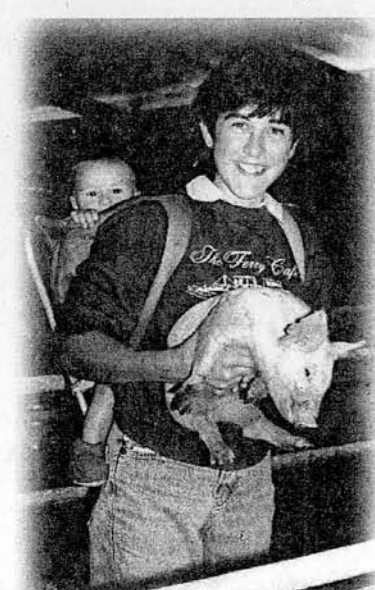
- 1993 from**
- Tallangatta Women on Farms Gathering - included women other States of Australia, and New Zealand.
 - Establishment of Australian Women in Agriculture Inc.
 - Women on the Land Gathering in Orange, New South Wales
 - First Queensland Rural Women's Gathering.
 - First nationwide meeting linking women in agriculture across Australia Research beginning.

- 1994**
- Women on Farms Gathering at Glenormiston in South West Victoria.
 - Second nationwide meeting of women in agriculture at Parli House, Canberra
 - First Tasmanian Women on Farms Gathering.
 - International Conference for Women in Agriculture, Melbourne, July.
 - Foundation FAAW established.

- 1995**
- Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing, China, including a deputation from the International Conference for Women in Agriculture held in Australia.
 - National Rural Women's Forum held at Parliament House, Canberra, 7-8 June
 - Swan Hill Women on Farms Gathering held in April.

- 1996**
- National Rural Women's Stakeholder's Meeting held in Canberra in January.
 - Tenth Anniversary of the Victorian Rural Women's Network.
 - Seventh Annual Women on Farms Gathering held in Ararat in May.
 - Appointment of a Rural Women's Network coordinator in Western Australia, and launch of their newsletter "Network News"
 - First SA Rural Women's Gathering held in Murray Bridge in October.
 - Launch of the SA Rural Network, and its newsletter "Paperbark".

- 1997**
- National Forum for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management held in at Parliament House, Canberra, in March.
 - Eighth Annual Women on Farms Gathering held in Bendigo 4-6 April.



Appendix 2

The Sunraysia Daily. Monday June 16 1997. Page 1



SUNRAISIA DAILY

Bringing People Together



Vol. 77 No. 143

Published since 1920

MILDURA, MONDAY, JUNE 16, 1997

Phone 03 5023 0211

Price 60c



WEATHER
MILDURA: Morning frost then fine. Mainly sunny day with light southerly wind. MALLEE: Wide-spread morning frost then fine and sunny. Cool. Details Page 6.

STUDENTS' SAY ON CURFEW

BIG MILDURA GOLD CUP DAY LIFTOUT INSIDE

MAVERICKS AT ENIGMATIC BEST

\$250,000 fire damage bill

THE damage bill to a Perth-bound semi-trailer after fire ripped through its two steel and paper laden trailers near Euston on Friday night is estimated at \$250,000.

The double "B" heavy transport vehicle was carrying 40 tonnes of steel and four pallets of Tex Pack magazines when a snapped wheel bearing started a small fire on the front off-side wheel of the rear trailer.

Euston police said the driver, spotting sparks from the wheel, pulled to the side of the Sturt Highway, 10 kilometres east of Euston, at about 10.45pm.

The driver, travelling from Wollongong, jumped out of the prime mover and tried unsuccessfully to unhitch the rear trailer before the fire spread to the second trailer.

Police said the man, an experienced truck driver, returned to the prime mover and

detached it as the fire engulfed both trailers. Senior Constable Gerard Grace, who attended the scene, said the Sturt Highway was blocked for more than 12 hours as the Euston Bush Fire Brigade mopped up the fire.

Sen. Const. Grace said motorists were lucky the vehicle came to a halt at a point where traffic could be easily diverted along Weather Road.

"It was fortunate he stopped where he did because 400 metres either way of the horse-shoe bypass would have meant the highway would have been totally blocked for more than 12 hours," he said.

Sen. Const. Grace said Anderson's Transport, of Euston, provided a crane at the scene to remove the steel and reload it onto another truck which will take it to Perth.

A Scottish perspective on rural life



● Gill Clark, from Scotland, will utilise her trusty bike in a study of how government policy affects women living in rural Australia.

By ALLAN MURPHY

SCOTTISH woman Gill Clark will be the first to tell you that people living in rural Australia are pretty well off.

Surprising, you may think!

High unemployment, farmers and blockies struggling to make ends meet, governments shredding service-

much discussion in her homeland, but her aims are that her seven years of study at both Edinburgh and Aberdeen Universities will result in action rather than words.

She is hopeful governments, based on information she will be able to provide, will help the situation.

Column 10

THE Deakin Avenue road works have claimed a keen cyclist who turned up to work last Friday looking more than just red-faced.

To avoid the heavy morning traffic and confident his mountain bike could handle the rough stuff, the intrepid rider plunged into the thick of the road works.

His cross-examination of the mud was slightly out though and he ended up sinking and then tipping into the thick red muck.

Undaunted, he continued peddling to work and we hear colleagues were able to trace his tracks throughout the building before a hot shower and change of clothes put his day back in order.

IT is 22 years since I motorcycle daredevil Evel Knievel was almost killed attempting to jump 13 single-decker buses at Wembley stadium — now his son is planting an even more dangerous stunt.

Robbie Knievel, 34, will return to the London stadium in September.

Appendix 3

Change and Continuity in Rural Australia. Research project flyer

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN RURAL AUSTRALIA:

Women's experiences of work, family life, and changing community values in Mildura

A Research Project: June 1997

Background.

Men have been described as the 'heart of rural Australia', but until the 1980s their contribution to rural communities, to the rural economy, was largely overlooked by the urban majority. The rural crisis of the late 1980s encouraged many rural women to speak out on the problems facing their communities, and since then new organisations such as the 'Rural Women's Network' and 'Women In Agriculture' have joined forces with existing organisations, such as the 'Country Women's Association', to lobby on behalf of rural women and their families for greater State and Federal recognition of, and support for, rural communities.

The last decade has seen rural women put forward women's perspectives on issues ranging from farm business management and the environment, to childcare and medical services in rural communities. State and Federal governments have now recognised the different, and often complementary, skills that rural women have to offer in family, business, and community life, and are now encouraging women and men to use these talents to make the rural economy more competitive, and to ensure the future prosperity of communities in rural Australia.

This research project is therefore part of a wider process of change for women in rural Australia. The aim of the project is, however, to look at both these recent changes, and the years preceding the 1980s, from the perspective of ordinary women living in a remote rural town. It is hoped that through reflecting on women's past and present experiences of rural living, their hopes for the future of themselves and their families, the project will help to raise awareness of both the challenges that rural communities face, and the cultural, social, and economic benefits that rural areas can offer to the wider Australian community.

Research Location

Mildura was selected as the case study town for the research due to its remote location within Victoria, the primary industries in the area, and the pioneering traditions of the town.

Research Aims

The project has four main research aims

- To invite a wide range of rural women to reflect on change and continuity in the Mildura area, and to talk about their own changing experiences of work, family life, and community in Mildura.

- To assess the past and present impact of Federal and State policies designed to assist rural women and their families, particularly in relation to health promotion, 'care in the community', resource management, and paid and voluntary work.

- To evaluate the role of existing rural women's organisations, and government policy, in supporting rural women's aspirations for the future.

- To use the research findings to assist policy makers in Scotland and Europe learn from the Australian experience.

Research Methodology and Timetable

The research project is a one year project, running in three phases over a 12 month period (October 1996 - October 1997). Phase one of the research has now been completed and involved 'participant observation' through which the researcher gained first hand experience of working in three rural enterprises in Victoria. Phase two of the research comprises of carrying out 'qualitative' interviews with women and service providers in the Mildura area. It is hoped that a wide range of women of all ages will be able to take part, and the interviews will be happening in the Mildura area between June and the beginning of September. Phase three of the research involves gathering contextual information on rural policy in Australia and attending meetings of rural women's organisations at a local and State level. This is an ongoing process throughout the 12 months of research.

Researcher

The research is being conducted by Gill Clark who is a University Research Fellow from Scotland. She has worked for the past six years at Edinburgh and Aberdeen Universities on several rural research initiatives which have been used to raise awareness of rural disadvantage, and to improve service provision in rural communities.

Research Outcomes and how to find out about the results of the research

It is hoped that the results of the research will be of use to rural women and their families in Australia and Scotland. The project will be written up as a report during 1998 which will be sent to everyone who took part in the research and also to relevant rural women's organisations. The research will also be written up as an academic PhD which should be completed during 1999, and which will also be made available in Australia.

If you would like more information about the project please contact Gill Clark at: PO Box 2948 Mildura 3502, or after September 1997, at Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh, Adam Ferguson Building, George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9LL, Scotland, UK.

The research is supported by The Carnegie Trust for The Universities in Scotland, The Northcote Children's Charity (administered by The Robert Gordon Centre for Australian Studies), and The Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga.

Appendix 4

North West Farmer week commencing 25 August 1997. Page 4



NORTH WEST
FARMER

CIRCULATING THROUGHOUT NORTHERN VICTORIA AND SOUTHERN N.S.W. RIVERINA DISTRICTS

REGIONAL TIMES
EXTRA

Australian rural women lead the world

AUSTRALIAN rural women ought to be proud.

They have accomplished much in terms of social reform and recognition. However, according to University of Edinburgh researcher, Gill Clark of Scotland, they must work hard to maintain what they have and push for further reform, for the sake of their local communities.

"Keep at it," said Ms Clark.

"The government doesn't have all the answers, but can help in building confidence.

"But you must encourage local spending and commitment."

Ms Clark is currently completing a study of rural Australian women and their experiences in Mildura.

She spent several years researching rural women's roles and perceived identities in the United Kingdom, hoping to "shift" government attitudes to achieving greater equality, and has come to study Australian women for comparison.

From her observations she says it appears "Australian women are already on their journey, in Scotland they are still

packing for the trip".

Ratling off some of Scotland's rural inequalities at a Swan Hill District Rural Women dinner, local members quickly realised they have it pretty good.

In Scotland, they are still wrangling with the image of the wrinkled up, poor old woman being representative of rural women in general.

The picture of the Australian rural woman today, conjures up the image of the well spoken, educated woman, who has her hands fixed on financial management, and with acquired time management skills, shares the household duties and family caring, whilst being active in the community.

It is far cry from the days when rural "housewives" were depicted with teapot in one hand and broomstick in the other.

Ms Clark said rural women in Scotland maintained similar roles, however the community and government had failed to recognise them.

She explained that in some areas of rural Scotland, women were still "expected" to have fresh baking available for visitors.

She said their struggle for identity was

exemplified by one woman who said: "When I was young, being a woman instead of being a girl was wearing a longer skirt".

Ms Clark said they are still fighting for childcare services and tertiary and further education funding assistance, feeling the squeeze on other services such as public transport and health services (sound familiar?), but what they received was nothing compared to what rural Australia receives.

"At least you have a government which appears to be supportive," she said.

She believes a lot of rural Scotland's problems had emanated from "party politics".

"Beware of false prophets.

"Don't allow them to make cuts to the status of women," she told members.

Her calls for continued commitment were prompted by the remarks of Federal Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, John Anderson, at the recent second Womens' Forum in Canberra. "Profitability brings prosperity," he said.

"People should come before profit," Ms Clark concluded.



Gill Clark

Victoria leads Planning crucial for Johnne's plan new season rice crops

AFTER months of pressing from the Victorian Government, Australia now has a national program to push for a national eradicate ovine Johnne's

"It shows we're determined to get rid of OJD," he said.

"Victoria has led the national program to push for a national eradicate ovine Johnne's

PLANNING for the new season New South Wales rice crop is becoming critical with the possibility of limited water supplies reducing rice areas.

NSW Agriculture rice program leader, Warwick Clappett said that while the storages on the Murrumbidgee and Murray Valley could improve

pre-season rice meetings to be held in late August and early September.

Over the next few weeks the Department's rice team will present a series of eight meetings for ricegrowers in all districts to review the timely topics of what happened last year, the results and lessons to be learnt.

Farming on the Internet

FARMWIDE is a Canberra based group, who are nearing completion of a 12 month pilot project, aimed at connecting

Appendix 6

Letter to 'Contextual' Respondents



ADDRESS IN AUSTRALIA:

Gill M. Clark
PO Box 2948
MILDURA VIC 3502

Telephone No. 03 5023 6028

DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The University of Edinburgh
Adam Ferguson Building
George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LL

Fax 0131 650 3945

Telex 727442 (UNIVED G)

Telephone 0131 650 1000

or direct dial 0131 650

12th June 1997

Dear [Respondent Name]

**Change and Continuity in Rural Australia:
Women's experiences of work, family life, and changing community values in Mildura**

I am a Research Fellow from Edinburgh University in Scotland, currently in Mildura carrying out research for the above project, and I enclose a flyer providing information about the aims and objectives of the research. As part of the research I will be seeking 'contextual information' from a range of local service providers, and I would like to ask you for your help with this part of the project.

Through the contextual interviewing, I hope to find out about local service providers' perspectives on the changing situation for women in Mildura, and to gather information about any specific strategies targeting women that have been put in place by the various local agencies and organisations. Therefore I would like to ask if it would be possible to interview you about the development of [Area of Service Provision] over the past few years, and about the role of [Respondent's Organisation] in the community. It would also be of use to discuss any other more general policies or issues that you feel are of current relevance in Mildura.

The semi-structured interview would take approximately one hour to complete, and would be conducted in confidence. The data gathered in the research will be analysed thematically, and no individual will be identified in any research reports.

The results of the research will be distributed in a report in 1998, and it is hoped that the findings will assist in providing an increased understanding of the needs of women in rural communities. The results of the research will also help to inform policy development in Scotland.

I will telephone you over the next week to see if you would be interested in taking part in the project, and if you are interested, I would be pleased to arrange a time when it would be convenient for me to visit your workplace to do the interview with you.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Yours sincerely,

Gill M. Clark

If it is possible to arrange an interview time with you and you later find that it is not convenient to meet at that time, please contact me on 5023 6028 and I would be pleased to arrange an alternative time and date.



Appendix 8

Letter to 'Life History' Respondents



DEPARTMENT of SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

ADDRESS IN AUSTRALIA:

Gill M. Clark
PO Box 2948
MILDURA VIC 3502

Telephone No. 03 5023 6028

The University of Edinburgh
Adam Ferguson Building
George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LL
Fax 0131 650 3945
Telex 727442 (UNIVED G)
Telephone 0131 650 1000
or direct dial 0131 650

13th June 1997

Dear [Respondent Name]

**Change and Continuity in Rural Australia:
Women's experiences of work, family life, and changing community values in Mildura**

It was good to speak to you on the telephone this week, and further to that conversation I enclose information about my research project. I am currently in Mildura carrying out research on social changes in Mildura, and in particular, the past and present situation for women in the town, and on the surrounding blocks and properties. To give you more information about the project I also enclose a flyer which outlines the aims and objectives of the research.

In June, July and August I will be doing informal interviews with a wide range of women in the area, and I would like to ask for your help with this part of the project.

The aim of these interviews is to hear about the past and present experiences of rural women, and about the challenges, and advantages and disadvantages, of life in the country. The interviews take about an hour, and are completely confidential - the results of the project will be presented by themes, such as 'changes in work for women', and no individual will be identified in the research report.

I am interested in finding out about everyday experiences of rural Australia, or about particular events which you may feel have been of importance in your life. The project aims to gather information from the perspective of ordinary women, and to emphasise the priorities of rural women and their families for the future of rural areas, rather than the priorities of service providers or government officials.

The results of the work will be of interest to local people, and will hopefully increase policy makers' and service providers' understanding of life in a rural community. The results of the research will also help to inform policy development in Scotland.

I will telephone you over the next week to see if you would be interested in taking part in the project, and if you are interested, I would be pleased to arrange a time when it would be convenient for me to visit your home to do the interview with you.

Thank you very much for your time and attention,

Yours sincerely,

Gill M. Clark

If it is possible to arrange an interview time with you and you later find that it is not convenient to meet at that time, please contact me on **5023 6028** and I would be pleased to arrange an alternative time and date.



Appendix 9

Women in Bread and Wine Country Research Findings

WOMEN IN BREAD AND WINE COUNTRY: Womens' Experiences of Work, Family Life, and Changing Community Values in Mildura, North-West Victoria.

Gill M. Clark

**University of Edinburgh
Department of Social Anthropology**

These research findings report on the results of 14 months of qualitative research work in rural Australia from Sept. 96 - October 97. The research focused on the impact of social and economic change in rural society on women's lives, and women's accounts of changing family and community values. Australia leads the world in the development of rural women's policies, and the research also assessed the grass roots impact and perception of these initiatives and programmes. The research is a confirmation of the relevance of the existing rural women's policy agenda in Australia, and is a contribution to the growing body of knowledge on Australian rural women's life experiences.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Women at the Grass Roots: Research Findings from Mildura

- The research reflects the diversity of rural women's interests, but also their common cause, and commitment to sustaining diverse and prosperous rural communities. The women who contributed to this research in the case study town of Mildura, emphasised the importance of changing attitudes to women's place in the world, in the home, schools, and community groups, as well as at a policy level. Women led by example, as much as by activism, in Mildura, and demonstrated success in business, primary industries, service provision, parenting, caring, and as homemakers. Women emphasised the importance of recognising women's contribution to the history of Sunraysia, as well as celebrating the opportunities open to younger women in the future. Grandmothers, mothers and daughters reflected on their changing aspirations, and on the need for women to be visible and respected on the land, in rural towns, in the family, and as individuals in their own right.
- The phenomenal success of the rural women's movement contrasted with a slower pace of change at the 'grass roots' and key issues raised were the importance of: recognising the challenges facing 'urban' rural women as well as women working in primary industries; supporting changes in education which encourage girls and women to fulfil their potential; recognising women's capacity for leadership, and excellence in business and primary industries; continuing support for women's health programmes, notably reproductive health; and the critical importance of providing greater support for women caring for family members with illness or disabilities in rural communities.
- Women championed changes in family values which meant that many men were now more involved with parenting and taking a greater role in homemaking. Women and men stressed the benefits gained by men by being more involved in child care and family life, and emphasised the advantages in marriage of men supporting women in fulfilling their potential both within and outwith the home.
- Considerable concern was expressed by women about the many 'families in crisis' in the community, in particular the impact of male unemployment in rural areas. Many women asserted that male unemployment led to increased levels of alcoholism, gambling, and domestic violence. Youth male suicide was viewed by many as symptomatic of a wider 'crisis of masculinity' in rural society, and expressed their concern about the many 'absent fathers' in households in Mildura. Women supported the promotion of positive male role models, and education programmes which would encourage boys to respect themselves, and to develop positive and more equal relationships with girls and women.

- Women in Mildura recognised the role of organisations such as the Country Women's Association and the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Club in managing and supporting change for women, but noted the challenges facing women who raised awareness of 'difficult' issues, such as domestic violence, in remote rural towns. There was universal support for the rural domestic violence initiatives.

The Wider Rural Women's Movement

- The Rural Women's Gatherings, and Rural Women's Networks and their magazines provided inspiration and support to women, and to their families and communities. The outstanding Rural Women's Network magazines, notably in NSW and Victoria, communicated vital information direct to women's homes and workplaces. The quality of these publications, and the close relationships forged via the medium of the magazines between policy makers, practitioners and women in communities was exemplary. State and Federal programs for rural women in Australia demonstrate 'best practice' in rural and community development work. The ABC Radio Rural Woman of The Year Award, and development of NGOs such as Australian Women in Agriculture, the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women and the formation of women's commodity groups has also enabled more women to become involved in the policy process, and raised the visibility of women in primary industries.
- The Rural Women's Unit and State support for rural women's issues have embedded a commitment towards the 'three legged stool' approach to rural women's policy at the heart of government, providing a balance between social, environmental and economic concerns. The research showed a commitment to an holistic approach to policy, and there was strong resistance amongst rural women to prioritising economic programmes above social or environmental concerns. Rural Women emphasised that 'people' not 'profitability' make prosperity in rural communities.
- 'Femocrats' (feminist bureaucrats), academics, rural activists, existing women's organisations and 'ordinary' rural women have formed unprecedented alliances at a local, regional, State and Federal level to campaign for rural communities. The first National Rural Women's Forum in 1995, provided a foundation for policy, written by rural women, for rural women, which has since drawn cross-party support. The research reflects the hope amongst ordinary rural women that politicians, policy makers and practitioners will continue to work together to support women and their families in rural communities.

Lessons For Scotland

- The lobbying skills and activism of the rural women's movement, and the commitment and the working confidence that exists between policy makers and rural women, provides valuable lessons for policy makers, practitioners and rural communities in Scotland. The experience of the Office for Status of Women, and State Departments for Women, has the potential to provide comparative models for the development of the relationship between the newly established Women's Unit reporting to the Westminster Parliament (in London, England) and women's representation in the new Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. The development of the Federal Rural Women's Unit could also provide a model for European Union action on rural women's issues.
- The rural women's movement in Australia has enabled women to claim their right to visibility in the rural economy, and empowered them to use women's ways of working to develop a sustainable future. The dynamism of the movement, and the success of women's commodity groups in primary industries in Australia, has the potential to demonstrate to rural women not only in Scotland, but also in Europe, the power women in rural communities can exert to defend the interest of their families and communities.

Background To The Research

The rise of the rural women's movement in Australia coincided with an unparalleled commitment at State and Federal level in Australia to gender equity in all areas of public policy and practice, resulting in the development of world-leading women's policies in Government, and unprecedented levels of consultation with women in metropolitan and rural communities. This work has important implications for policy development within Scotland and Europe, and therefore the aims and objectives of the research were:

1. To invite a wide range of rural women in a remote rural case study community to reflect on change and continuity in the community, and to talk about their own experiences of work and family life.
2. To assess the past and present impact of Federal and State policies designed to assist rural women and their families, particularly in relation to health promotion, resource management, and paid and voluntary work;
3. To evaluate the role of existing rural women's organisations, and government policy, in supporting rural women's aspirations for the future;
4. To use the research findings to assist policy makers in Scotland and Europe learn from the Australian experience.

About the Research

The research was conducted over fifteen months between September 1996 and October 1997. The case study town for the research was Mildura, a remote rural settlement in north-west Victoria. The town, designated as a 'Rural City' in Australia, was selected on the basis of geographical remoteness, the changing nature of primary industries in the area, and the pioneering traditions of the community. Women involved in horticultural production are also under-represented in rural women's research in Australia.

The Research included:

- Eight months of 'Participant Observation' research, living and working with three separate households involved in horticulture, livestock farming and tourism, and a millinery micro business.
- A series of 52 qualitative interviews with rural service providers and rural women.
- Participation in the Country Women's Association, Business and Professional Women's Federation Club, and a Landcare Group in the case study community.
- Participation in the 1997 'Rural Women's Gatherings' in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia.
- Observer at the 'Women in Agriculture and Resource Management Forum' in Canberra hosted by the Federal Government in March 1997.
- Speaker and delegate at the 'Rural Australia Towards 2000' Conference in Wagga Wagga in July 1997.
- Networking with rural women's activists, academics and policy makers.
- Gathering policy information from service providers specialising in rural womens' concerns.

Further Information

These Research Findings summarise a research report which was written to present the results of the research in a non-academic format. For more information about the research project, or information about academic output from the research, please contact Gill Clark at the address below, or on email.

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This research was supported by The Carnegie Trust for The Universities in Scotland, The Northcote Children's Charity (administered by The Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies at the University of London), and The Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW.

Appendix 10

Women in Bread and Wine Country Research Report

WOMEN IN BREAD AND WINE COUNTRY: Womens' Experiences of Work, Family Life, and Changing Community Values in Mildura, North-West Victoria.

A Research Report

Gill M. Clark

Department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh
Adam Ferguson Building, George Square, Scotland, UK.

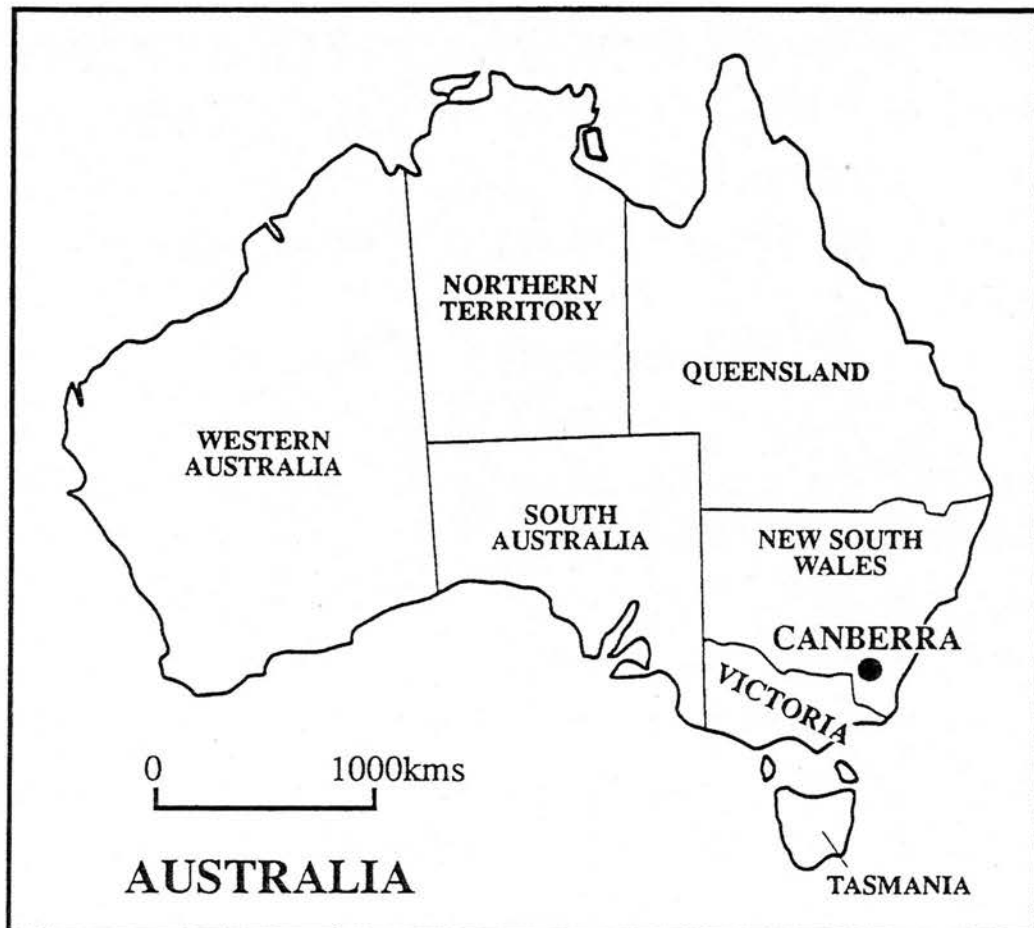
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September 1998

This research was supported by The Carnegie Trust for The Universities in Scotland, The Northcote Children's Charity (administered by The Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies at the University of London), and The Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW.

If you would like more information about the research, or would like to be notified of any other research outputs from this study, please contact Gill M. Clark at the above postal or email address. Please do not reproduce, publish, or post on the Internet, any of the material in this report without the author's prior consent.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Background to the Research

Since 1990 I have worked at Edinburgh University and Aberdeen University as a Research Fellow on a series of rural research projects which have been used to raise awareness of rural disadvantage, and to improve service provision in communities in rural Scotland. After completing work on the first study of poverty and disadvantage in rural Scotland for many years, I took forward research findings from the study in the form of a policy briefing about rural women's issues in Scotland.

I reviewed work from overseas as part of this work, and it became clear that both the Scottish Office, and the British Westminster Government, lagged well behind the rest of the world in policy development for rural women, and that Australia had developed world-leading strategies for women in metropolitan and rural areas.

I therefore obtained funding from The Carnegie Trust for The Universities in Scotland, The Northcote Children's Charity (administered by The Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies at the University of London), and The Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW, to support fifteen months of research in rural Australia between September 1996 and October 1997. The research aimed to find out about rural women's policy development in Australia, to do intensive 'qualitative' research in a 'case study community' to find out what ordinary women thought about their family life and work in the 1990s, and if rural women's policy had made a difference to their lives.

This summary research report has been produced to present the general research findings relating to all aspects of the research, in a non-academic format, and is aimed primarily at the many women who contributed to the research, notably in the case study town of Mildura. I hope that this summary report and the attached 'Findings' will inform policy makers and practitioners and help to promote knowledge and reflection among people living in or working with Australian rural communities. Articles relating to the research will also be sent to Rural Women's Network, CWA and BPW magazines, and the PhD thesis which is the main academic output from this research, and other academic articles focusing on particular aspects of the research, should be in the public domain towards the end of 1999.

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the support, interest and enthusiasm of the many women I met in Australia. In particular I would like to thank Carinya Branch of the Country Women's Association; BPW Mildura; Yelta Landcare; the many individual women and men I interviewed in Mildura; and the exceptional women I met at the 1997 Rural Women's Gatherings in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. I would also like to thank Ruth Hennessey of 'Mount Ophir Estate' Rutherglen, and Krystyna Schweizer of 'Hotpotch Ecowear', now based in Brisbane, who provided such valuable insights into the pleasures and pitfalls of running a small and micro business in rural Australia, and Dr. Margaret Alston, Jane Wilkinson, Debbie Strachan, and other members of staff the Centre for Rural Social Research at Charles Sturt University for their valuable support and encouragement.

Gill M. Clark
September 1998

ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ADFA	Australian Dried Fruits Association
AWIA	Australian Women in Agriculture
BPW	Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women
CCT	Compulsory Competitive Tender
CBD	Central Business District
CWA	Country Women's Association
FAAW	Foundation of Australian Agricultural Women
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
NESB	Non English Speaking Background
RWN	Rural Women's Network
WARM	Women in Agriculture and Resource Management
WWOOF	Willing Workers on Organic Farms

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Network magazine is available free from:

The Rural Women's Network
7/240 - 250 Victoria Pde (PO Box 500)
East Melbourne 3002.

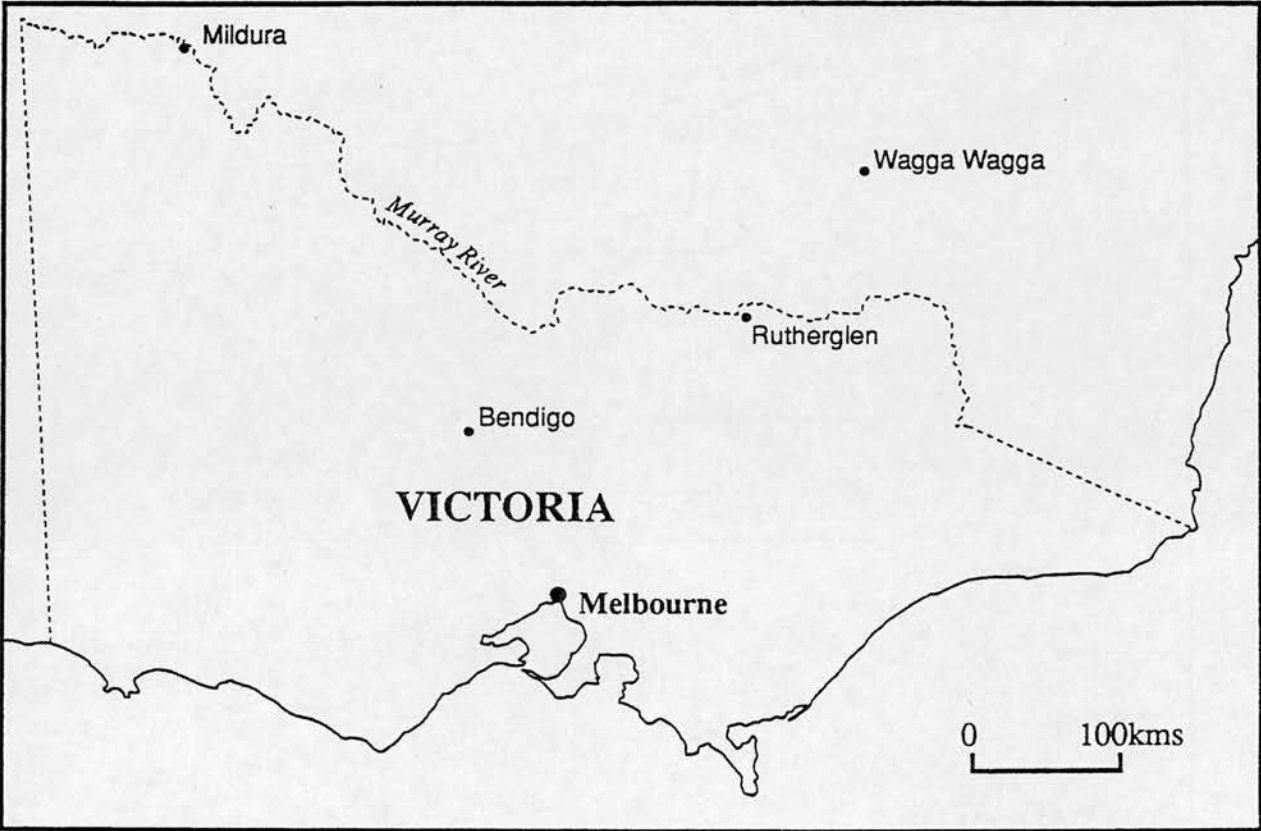
Loddon Mallee Women's Health News Journal is available free from:

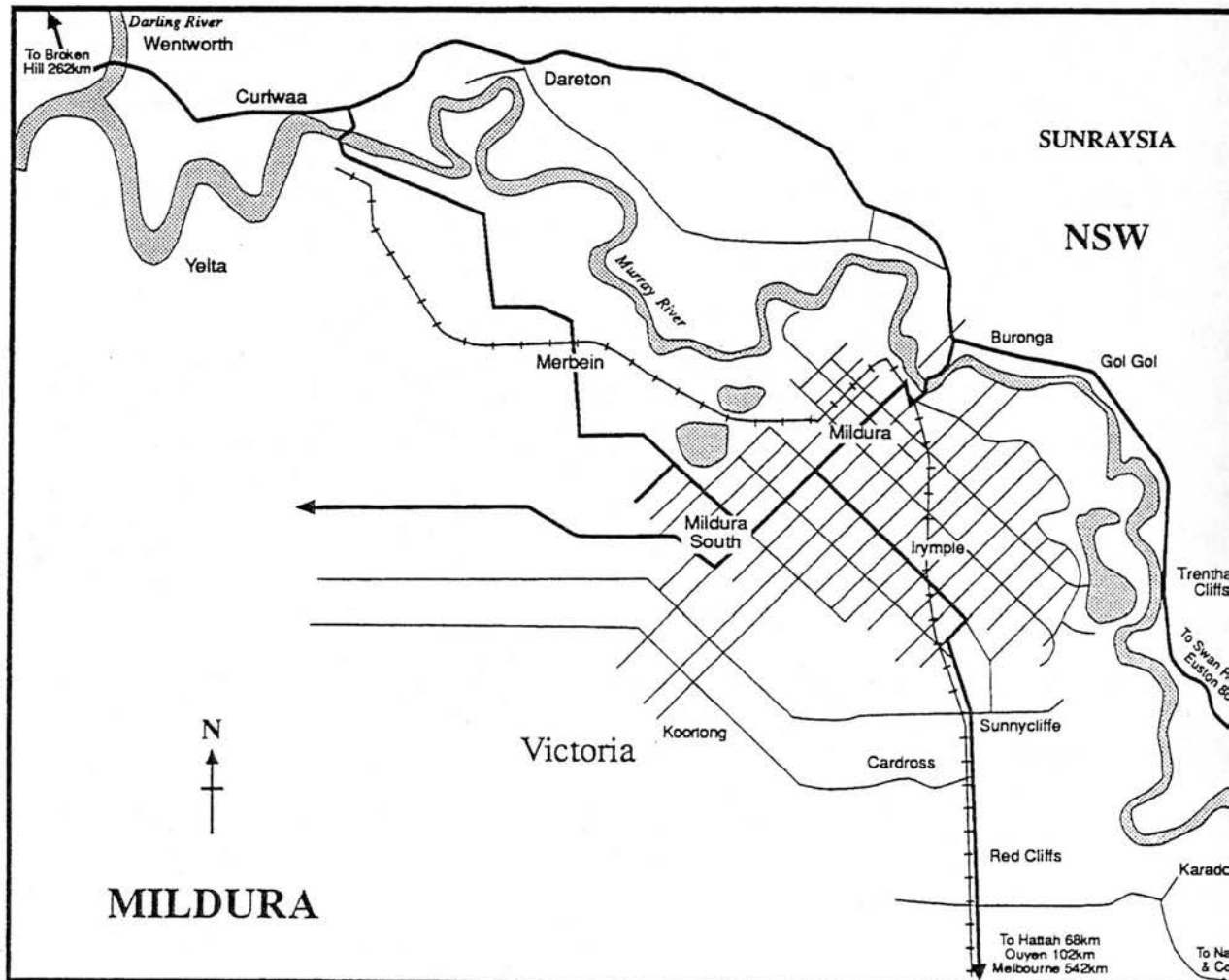
Loddon Mallee Women's Health
48 Queen Street
Bendigo, 3550.
Freecall 1800 350 233.
Tel No. 03 5443 0233.

The **National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit** is available from Available from Gordon Kelly,
Department of Administrative Services Distribution Unit in Canberra, Tel. 02 6202 5536 and Loddon Mallee
Women's Health domestic violence worker, Tel. 03 5443 0233,

The Rural Women's Unit

Rural Division
DPIE
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601
Tel. 06 271 6362
Fax. 06 272 3025
email Elizabeth.Wilson@dpi.gov.au





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Women have been described as the 'heart of rural Australia', but until the 1980s their contribution to rural communities, and to the rural economy, was largely overlooked by the urban majority. The rural crisis of the late 1980s encouraged many rural women to speak out on the problems facing their communities, and since then, the 'Rural Women's Network' (RWN) established in 1987, 'Australian Women In Agriculture' (AWIA) and the Federation of Australian Agricultural Women' (FAAW) formed in 1993 and 1994 respectively, have joined forces with existing organisations, notably the 'Country Women's Association' (CWA) and the 'Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW), to lobby on behalf of rural women and their families for greater State and Federal recognition of, and support for, rural communities.

The year of this research, 1997, coincided with the tenth anniversary of the Rural Women's Network and the end of a decade of social justice programmes, and research respondents largely took for granted policy and programmes ranging from childcare provision to affirmative action that would, both before and after the recent change of government, be inconceivable in the United Kingdom and in many other parts of the world.

The sophistication of Australian rural women's policy, and the vision and skills of rural activists, provide numerous examples of best practice which have the potential to inspire policy makers and rural communities elsewhere in the world. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to work with rural women using 'participant observation' and 'life history interview' methodological approaches to reflect on processes of change in their lives; to consider how rural policy had affected their lives; to report on rural women's priorities for future policy development, and to learn lessons for policy development and rural activism in Scotland.

The four main aims of the research were:

- To invite a wide range of rural women in a remote rural case study community to reflect on change and continuity in the community, and to talk about their own experiences of work and family life.
- To assess the past and present impact of Federal and State policies designed to assist rural women and their families, particularly in relation to health promotion, resource management, and paid and voluntary work;
- To evaluate the role of existing rural women's organisations, and government policy, in supporting rural women's aspirations for the future;
- To use the research findings to assist policy makers in Scotland and Europe learn from the Australian experience.

02 RESEARCH AREA AND METHODOLOGY

02.1 Research Area

The majority of the research for this report was conducted in Mildura a remote 'Rural City' in north-west Victoria (see Maps 1, 2 & 3). Mildura Rural City Council covers 22,330 square kilometres, and is the largest municipality in Victoria. The 1996 Census Basic Community Profile reported a population of 40,644. Mildura and the surrounding irrigation district and Mallee farming area was chosen as a case study area on the basis of geographical remoteness, the changing nature and diversity of primary industries in the area, and because women involved in horticultural production are under-represented in rural women's research in Australia. Research was also conducted at the 1997 Victoria, Queensland, New South Wales, and South Australia rural women's gatherings.

02.2 Research Methodology

The methodology used in the research was a combination of 'participant observation' research, 'contextual interviews' with service providers and rural practitioners, and 'life history' interviews with a wide range of rural women. 'Participant Observation' research aims to provide the researcher with a 'first hand' experience of rural life. Eight months were therefore spent living and working with three separate households involved

in horticulture, livestock farming and tourism, and a millinery micro business. This research work was initially facilitated through the 'wwoof'¹ scheme.

The second phase of research was conducted over four months, and involved a series of 52 semi-structured interviews. Nineteen 'contextual interviews' were carried out with broadly representative sample rural service providers and practitioners in health, welfare and environmental services, and the aim of the interviews was to find out about local practitioner perspectives on the changing situation for women in Mildura, and to gather information about any specific programmes or strategies for women in the area.

Thirty-two interviews were then carried out with a broadly representative sample of women in Mildura, which included women recruited through the 'snowballing' technique, individuals recommended for interview, and members of CWA, BPW, a local Quilt Group, women involved in resource management, and younger women involved in the youth club. Women representatives from three of the local Churches were also interviewed. The aim of the interviews with women was to record past and present experiences of women in the town and wider farming communities, and to reflect on change over time or specific life events. The respondents were asked to comment on their education and expectations of life, paid work, marriage and changing expectations relating to parenting and unpaid work within the home, and life in Mildura in the 1990s. The respondents were also asked to comment on issues were of particular importance to them.

The response to the research was very positive, and everyone who was approached for interview agreed to take part, except in cases where health or seasonal work pressures precluded participation. All the interviews were tape-recorded and respondents were assured of confidentiality. No respondents will be individually identified in this or any other research output. Respondents ranged in age from 12 to over 80 and included NESB and migrant women, and women with both country and city backgrounds. Of the contextual sample of 19 interviews, six of the sample were men.

The scope of the research was also broadened through participation in a local branch of the CWA, the local BPW Club, and a Landcare group. Living in the Mildura area also provided many more informal insights into life in country Victoria, which also contribute to the report. The research aimed to reflect the views of 'ordinary people' living in Mildura, and the methodology aimed to promote knowledge and reflection within the community, and encouraged people to talk about their lives and issues that were important to them in their own words.

Outside of Mildura, participation in the 'Rural Women's Gatherings' in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia provided a valuable context to the research, as did speaking at the 'Rural Australia Towards 2000' Conference in Wagga Wagga in July 1997, and being permitted to observe the 'Women in Agriculture and Resource Management Forum' in Canberra hosted by the Federal Government in March 1997. The State Rural Women's Network co-ordinators, and civil servants in the Rural Women's Unit were also very supportive of this research.

02.3 Presentation of research findings

The diversity of rural women has been emphasised in recent years by the work of the rural women's network: rural women have organised together, and through their work have emphasised both their 'difference' and their common cause. The women involved in this research were very different women, and ranged from young teenagers intent on travelling the world, or representing their country in sport, to women who had lived in station country for most of their lives. They were women from Australia and from around the world, who all happened to be in Mildura when this research was carried out. The experience of women who married during the second world war contrasted dramatically with younger women who grew up in the 1980s, and the research hopefully reflects the diversity of opinion of women, but also the common priorities and concerns of women living in Mildura, issues which were echoed in the rural women's gatherings, and policy for women.

The results of the research are presented therefore thematically, and the report presents in Section I perceptions of life in Mildura; Section II women's experiences of work; Section III the changing nature of the family and interpersonal relationships; and finally in Section IV, processes of change and the policy context. The report also stresses the importance of the relationship between the public and private sphere, in relation to women realising their potential.

¹ WWOOF is an international scheme 'Willing Workers On Organic Farms' whereby farmers, or in Australia any interested householders (through the 'Australian Cultural Exchange' listings), exchange food and accommodation for farm or business work.

Quotations from the tape recorded interviews are used to illustrate, in their own words, the experiences of the respondents. In the light of the high quality of recent work on rural women in Australia² this report should be viewed essentially as a confirmation of the existing agenda for rural women³ and a contribution to the growing body of knowledge on rural women's experiences.

-
- ² For example: **City Women Country Women. Crossing the Boundaries**, Melbourne:Artemis Publishing Pty Ltd, 1995; **Rural Women. Keypapers Number 1**, Wagga Wagga:Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University-Riverina, 1990; Alston, M. **Women on The Land. The Hidden Heart of Rural Australia**, Kensington, NSW:UNSW Press, 1995; Bailey, A., Brinkley, C., Brown, D., Butler, C., Penny, L. and Webb, M. **More Than One Way. A Report on the Rural Women's Network. "Hearing Rural Women's Voices" Project**, Horsham, Victoria:Office of Rural Affairs, 1996; Kerby, J., McClure, L., Westley, A. and Young, M. **Valuing Women as Customers. A report as part of PISA's contribution to the Centenary of Women's Suffrage in South Australia 1894-1994. PISA Technical Report Number 248**, Adelaide:Primary Industries South Australia, 1996; Victoria Women's Council, **Getting to the heat of Victoria. Working with women in rural and remote communities. A report on Victoria Women's Council Rural Consultations**, Melbourne:Victoria Women's Council, 1995.
- ³ **National Rural Women's Forum. Parliament House, Canberra 7-8 June 1995. A report to the Department of Primary Industries and Energy**, Wagga Wagga:Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University-Riverina, 1995.

SECTION I

03 PERCEPTIONS OF MILDURA:

"the fruit of the earth, the bread and the wine, this is bread and wine country."⁴

Mildura and the satellite settlements of Merbein, Irymple and Red Cliffs are located on the Murray River 500k north of Melbourne in north-west Victoria, on the border with New South Wales, and 150k from the South Australian border.

The history of Mildura is well-documented by the Mildura local history society, and several detailed publications. The town of Mildura was established in 1887 as an irrigation colony by William and George Chaffey, and linked to the rest of the State by a rail line which was opened in 1903. The prosperity of the town was built on the dried vine fruit and citrus industries, and the population of Mildura has expanded during the twentieth century as migrants from the former Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, and more recently from Turkey, have settled in the Mildura and wider Sunraysia district.

The population of the municipality is now divided between the essentially urban, and increasingly suburban city of Mildura, the surrounding irrigation districts, and the outlying Mallee dryland farming communities. One respondent commented the townspeople and irrigators were essentially insulated from the dry land farmers, and that "About the only link they've got is the occasional dust storm", but the townspeople, irrigators and dryland farmers were also reported to have formed distinct but interdependent communities of interest, who all expressed great pride in the Sunraysia and Mallee region. Some identified the isolation from Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne as an advantage for the area, forcing 'positive parochialism'.

All respondents were asked to comment on their perceptions of life in Mildura for men and women alike, and the results are presented below.

03.1 External Perceptions of Mildura

Outside of Victoria, it was felt that few people knew where Mildura was, and inside Victoria respondents asserted that perceptions of Mildura focused on sunshine, oranges, grapes, and the fact that Mildura was 'the end the line' in Victoria. One respondent even commented that "most Victorians thought that Mildura was very close to the edge of the earth". Respondents reported when visiting Mildura, visitors and relatives regularly spent their first day in Mildura complaining at the distance and the fact that, according to them, there was "nothing to see" en route to Mildura. Many respondents commented that their relatives and friends rarely made repeat or regular visits to Mildura because of the long journey time, but expected them to travel south or inter-state to maintain the family or friendship links. In addition, many respondents reported that although friends or relatives who lived away from the area thought that Mildura was the "back blocks", the people who lived in the region felt that the area was very closely settled compared to the station country north of Mildura.

The stunning landscape and natural features of the area were appreciated by respondents, and it was hoped that the local 'eco-tourism' would be able to promote increased awareness of the natural beauty of the area. Mallee sunsets and sunrises, the mist rising off the river in the morning, moonlight on the vines, and a sense of security engendered by being able to see the horizon, were all features that captured respondent's sense of 'belonging' to the locality. When returning home to Mildura many respondents said that they felt 'overwhelmed' by the greenery of the irrigation district, after driving through the desert.

Most respondents were philosophical about external perceptions of the area, but several respondents noted that problems did arise when accessing services in Melbourne if service providers telephoned to change appointment times without realising that their clients had a one day journey to reach Melbourne.

03.2 Internal Perceptions of Mildura

Internal perceptions of Mildura were generally very positive. The comment from one respondent that "Everyone thinks Mildura is rural, except people who live here who think they're in a big city" was reflected in some respondents' views that Mildura had been transformed over the past 12 years from a sleepy rural town into a thriving city. For many respondents Mildura was a combination of a close knit rural town, "Very Catholic, Very Football" according to one respondent, and a go-ahead remote metropolis with the capability

⁴ The comments of one respondent, reflecting on her perceptions of Mildura and the surrounding country (Mildura 1997).

of becoming a major exporting centre to Asia: one respondent described Mildura as "a go ahead city with a laid back lifestyle". There was a strong sense of Civic pride, and a resolution that it would be possible to retain some of the positive characteristics of small town life, while competing in a global economy.

The past 10 - 12 years were described by long-term and more recent residents of Mildura as a time of rapid change in the city, and some long term residents commented that change was marked by them by the necessity to lock up cars and houses, and the presence of more "strangers" in the city: several respondents felt that Mildura was a 'trusting community' subject to abuse from outsiders. Restricted city centre parking was seen as an unwelcome sign of progress and development, and several respondents commented that the presence of parking metres would mark the complete transition of the town from a rural town to a 'proper' city. Recent housing developments over former blocks, and the 15th Street commercial strip development were also viewed as indicative of Mildura's transition from a small town to a major regional centre.

03.3 Advantages of Life in Mildura

The advantages of life in Mildura were reported to be a slower pace of life with an emphasis on a simplicity of lifestyle, and a sense that negative influences, notably on young people, took longer to reach Mildura. These views were contradicted in a variety of contexts by many other respondents (see below), but there was a strong sense that Mildura still retained a sense of community and belonging, and that children growing up in Mildura were less street-wise, but more independent, than their city counterparts.

Respondents felt that 'hard work' and a 'responsible attitude' could bring a high standard of living and a high quality of life in Mildura. There was perceived to be an excellent choice of housing, and respondents valued the space and openness of the city. Good employment opportunities, combined with very short travel to work times made it an attractive location for families, and the sporting facilities were widely reported to be amongst the best in the State. Twenty-four hour supermarket opening was cited as an unusual but much appreciated advantage to Mildura, and respondents emphasised the wide range of clubs and societies that thrived in the town ranging from a scuba diving club to a pipe band. Shopping facilities were very good, and Mildura boasted numerous high quality local restaurants and national franchise restaurants.

03.4 Disadvantages of Life In Mildura

When asked to reflect on any negative aspects of living in Mildura, respondents asserted that disadvantages to life in Mildura were limited. Key issues identified were children's access to galleries and museums, and despite the common external perception of Mildura as a 'multicultural' town, many respondents suggested that compared to the urban centres in Australia, Mildura was quite homogenous, and that children were largely unaware of the increasing diversity of Australian society: one mother commented that she thought it was important that her son knew that 'people with green hair' existed.

03.5 Isolation

Isolation was viewed as an advantage, and a disadvantage. Although Mildura was geographically isolated, in general respondents felt that Mildura as a self-contained regional centre was not as isolated as elsewhere, for example respondents often commented that Mildura was not as isolated as Pooncarie or Broken Hill to the north in New South Wales.

Respondents reported that technology, notably the Internet and satellite television created a sense of participation in, rather than isolation from, the rest of Victoria, Australia, and even the global community. Relatively low cost airfares meant that those who could afford to, made regular trips to Melbourne for business, recreation and shopping. One respondent reflected that while it had taken her fifty years to travel to Alice Springs, her daughter's generation thought nothing of regular world travel. Almost every respondent commented on the recent loss of the passenger train service, and although few of the respondents had used the train, virtually all respondents said that the absence of the train connection to Melbourne made them feel very 'cut off' from the capital city. Although the aeroplanes were visible flying in and out of the airport several times a day, respondents reported that they had felt reassured by the sounds of the train passing through the town. Those who were perceived to be most disadvantaged by the loss of the train were women with children who did not have access to a car to make long journeys.

Respondents commented that isolation was felt when they or members of their family had a special need, for example a learning disability or a serious illness, as specialist services for relatively uncommon special needs were not available in Mildura. The lack of local specialist Cancer services were also a concern to respondents, and although respondents had received high quality care, the isolation of Mildura meant that they were required to travel to other parts of the State to access care. Longer term treatments such as chemotherapy

which necessitated staying away from home for several weeks, sometimes leaving other family members in Mildura, was considered to be a great strain for families.

The isolation of Mildura was, however, also seen as a real advantage to living in the town. Several respondents commented that when they were younger they had been desperate to leave what as younger people they had referred to as "hicks town", but as they grew older they appreciated the isolation and remoteness of the town. In particular, many respondents like the sense of personal privacy that they could attain in Mildura. Isolation from close neighbours and an ability to choose to not participate in community events was seen as a definite advantage to life in Mildura. When asked if she had ever felt isolated, a woman living out of the CBD commented:

"No never, the more isolated I am the better I like it. No, I've never ever felt isolated here...the social life is tremendous, the problem here is to stay out of enough to keep yourself sane, you know there are so few people you get *drawn* into everything."

The layout of the town, and the location of many block houses in the centre of a block, meant that it was possible to be very isolated within a short distance from the city centre. Social isolation experienced by individuals who were perceived not to "fit in" with Mildura are discussed below, and several respondents commented that television had brought about a different type of isolation with people more interested in 'Days of Our Lives' an American imported television series, or the television sports coverage, than with engaging with the world around them. Some women found the social pressures and expectations for women constraining, and one woman commented:

"I find that the mindset is more isolating, more restrictive than the miles from Melbourne."

There was, however, also a perceived need to raise awareness of Mildura in Victoria to reduce the negative aspects of isolation. During the heat wave of 1997, which was the worst heat wave for almost twenty years, while Mildura sweltered in temperatures in the mid forties, the State television news reports focused on the impact of comparatively less severe heat waves in Melbourne and Adelaide. This led several people to comment about the 'invisibility' of Mildura: respondents reported that until recently Mildura had not featured on inter-State road signs, contributing to a sense of distance and isolation in the town.

03.6 Mildura as 'Different' to Other Places In Australia

Most respondents viewed themselves as 'Victorians' and 'Australians' as well as being 'from Mildura', but frequently commented that Mildura was undoubtedly 'different' to anywhere else in Australia.

The unusual climate and the distance to the nearest settlements, lent a sense of 'island living' to the lifestyle in Mildura. One respondent commented that Mildura people were "the untouchables" far away from the troubles of the world, and many of the respondents described the town as a "different world", "another world", or a "different planet". It was also suggested by several respondents that the town was a "redneck" town, an attribute which was viewed by many as a positive contribution to the diversity in the town, rather than representative of a social problem.

04 SERVICE PROVISION IN MILDURA

All of the respondents were asked to comment on service provision in the town, their general perception of services, and to identify any 'un-met needs' in the community. Respondents perceptions of services, coming both from service providers and respondents are summarised below.

04.1 Perceptions of Service Provision

In general, the dramatic improvement in the levels of government service provision in rural communities since the 1960s, meant that many respondents contrasted what was available now to what had been available thirty or forty years ago. Utility services were viewed as satisfactory, and for example, several respondents favourably compared the medical facilities available today with the visiting GP who had been the primary care provider in their youth.

Although some respondents had reservations about the changing funding structures, and increased fiscal pressures facing service providers, the practitioners appeared to have successfully negotiated changing funding mechanisms to ensure that high quality services were available in Mildura. In general, there was concern that the State government was cutting funding to particular programmes and then replacing the

programmes with new initiatives and presenting the replacement programme as 'new' spending. The subsequent lack of continuity in some services was viewed as a cause for some concern amongst ordinary respondents and those involved in service provision, but a sanguine approach to services was evident with many respondents recommending that people had to make the most of a service while it was available. Some excellent programmes were in place, and some innovative work was being carried out notably in the areas of women's health and children's services. All service providers stressed the absolute necessity to keep reminding fiscal departments in Government of Mildura's existence: it was commonly felt that State Government Departments had a sense of country Victoria ending at Bendigo.

Deeper concerns were, however, expressed about the way in which the interest in 'product', 'output', or 'economics' in service provision appeared to be prioritised over 'people', or the needs of the community. There was particular concern that funding constraints in health and special needs education would mean that those most in need of services would not be able to afford to access them. Many respondents felt that Australia had been spending money on services it could not afford, and that the new millennium would see an increasing gap between rich and poor in Australia. Several people also questioned what they perceived to be the emphasis on the immediate cost of running a service, rather than a focus on the long term implications of the service.

Economic rationalist policies had undoubtedly had an impact in Mildura. For example, reform of the electricity supply was also viewed negatively and there was a widespread perception that staffing cuts left the electricity companies with inadequate staff cover in rural communities, and with insufficient technical expertise in the urban centres to deal with rural problems. Redundancies as a result of rationalisation were also having a negative impact on Mildura. At the time of research, railwaymen's jobs were being cut, and the loss of "ordinary labouring" jobs was perceived to be particularly damaging to the community. In addition management posts in the public sector had been considerably reduced in the Mildura area, and at all levels there was concern about not only the loss of the jobs, but also the withdrawal of the concomitant salary from the Mildura economy, and children from local schools, as managers moved away from the area.

A consultant speaking at a community consultation meeting in Mildura in January 1997, commented that: "It has been said that economically driven policies lose sight of the social issues, but economic prosperity leads to social justice and employment." This, however, was not a view shared by the majority of respondents who emphasised that prosperity and profitability were not the same thing, and that they were concerned about profitability being achieved at the expense of wider community prosperity.

04.2 Working as a service provider in Mildura

A challenge for service providers in Mildura was that their client base was both urban and rural. "The tyranny of distance is horrendous on us", was a common observation, and for example in health care provision the client base extended from the CBD of Mildura to remote farming communities in the Millewa. The diversity of client base was, however, also viewed as an advantage as in many fields it meant that the pressure to specialise was not as strong as in urban workplaces, and opportunities arose more often to 'act up' in a temporary capacity, or to seek earlier promotion in a rural context. Conversely the tendency for some individuals to remain in the same job over many years meant that in some situations it was very difficult to introduce new ideas or new ways of working. Service providers in Mildura reported good networking, and good relationships between agencies and organisations, and good channels of communication.

Disadvantages reported by service providers primarily focused on the limited opportunities for professional development, and the distance and costs involved in accessing training. Distance to libraries and other resources were also noted as a problem, although funding for distance learning had ameliorated these problems in the past.

04.3 Health and Social Welfare

Mildura has a very high number of households reliant on statutory incomes, with concomitant social problems linked to low income and unemployment; factors complicated by the high divorce rate in Mildura. In response to these problems, Mallee Family Care managed a number of innovative social services linked to problem gambling financial counselling, and support for families in crisis. MFC was perceived to be meeting an important need in the community. The perception that there was help available for everyone who needed it (notably in comparison to the lack of provision in the past), and the excellent reputation of Mallee Family Care the local social work agency, meant that respondents expressed general satisfaction with service provision, although many recognised that there were still 'families in crisis' in Mildura.

Women's health is discussed in Section III as it was a major concern of women, not only in relation to women's health but in relation to their role as primary carers in the household. Key concerns for women focused on ante-natal and postnatal support for young women, and women's mental health issues, and aged care provision for women and men.

04.4 Education and Childcare

Respondents were very positive about the education available in the Mildura area. Respondents were positive about the quality of education in both the state and private sector. Schools in Mildura also served children who boarded in Mildura from the outlying areas, and several respondents had educated their own children through correspondence courses, or School of The Air. Several respondents had supported the work of the Isolated Children Parent's Association, and stressed the need for more support for mothers and fathers who were home educating their children at primary level.

Special needs education was seen by several respondents as the major deficiency in the local education system. Respondents were concerned about what they felt was the lack of specialist knowledge within the medical and education professions in Mildura relating to children with special needs. Several respondents expressed concern about under-diagnosis of learning disabilities due to lack of experience in this area.

Respondents welcomed the introduction of tertiary courses at the Mildura TAFE, and emphasised the financial problems facing parents attempting to support their children through university. In particular, many respondents supported the campaign to ensure that asset-rich income poor farmers were not disadvantaged in applications for Austudy grants.

With regard to childcare and pre-school education, there was also a widespread perception that the Federal Administration at the time of fieldwork, led by John Howard, was planning to cut funding to childcare provision in real terms, and the majority of respondents felt that this alleged move was out of step with women's priorities.

04.5 Non-Governmental Organisations and Service Provision

The non-governmental organisations played an important role in supporting services in Mildura. The voluntary sector was very strong in the town, and support for services and charitable events came from the RSL, Apex, Lions, Rotary and Freemasons. The volunteer network for Mallee Family Care was also extensive, and women played a critical role in all areas in coming forward to fill 'service provision gaps' where they arose.

04.6 The Churches in Mildura

The Churches in Mildura were viewed by some respondents as central to the community, and by others as peripheral except in times of community crisis, when it was felt that people still turned to the Churches for leadership. The Churches were important to people, although respondents felt that the way people related to the Churches was changing, notably through changing church attitudes to divorce and the role of women within marriage. As 'service providers' in a rural community, representatives from the Anglican, Catholic and Uniting churches provided a very interesting perspective on new approaches to rural ministry, employing 'Team Ministry' models, and developing new Ministry initiatives involving lay members of the congregations. All churches emphasised their focus on supporting families in crisis - a recurrent theme throughout the research project.

Church Buildings in Mildura were viewed as an important community resource, and The Salvation Army and The Society of St Vincent de Paul maintained a high profile in providing welfare support within the town. Hospital visitation was viewed by many respondents as a very welcome 'service' provided by the Churches, in particular the work performed by Sister Nora, which was reported to have touched many people's lives.

05 PERCEPTIONS OF THE LOCAL ECONOMY

Respondent's discussion of Mildura's economy focused on Mildura's place in a 'world market'. Mildura's primary industries focused on export markets, with producers exporting directly to Korea, Japan, USA and other countries. The burgeoning export market for the wine industry, also emphasised Mildura's place in a 'global trading environment'. Sunraysia was discussed by respondents as a region competing with South Africa, South America and even European producers, without the prospect of any Government assistance. Respondents spoke about there being 'no boundaries' for trade or competition, and as the much publicised

import of orange juice concentrates from Brazil emphasised, global market forces had an influence in Mildura. Respondents involved in the past or present with primary industries stressed the need for producers to focus on where their enterprise fitted in with a 'global market' to ensure future trading success, and as the comment below reflects, farming respondents emphasised that to be successful in the late 1990s farmers had to grow for specific and targeted markets. One farmer commented:

"A lot of farmers are still believing if they've grown something it should be able to be marketed. We all know the days are gone when you can just grow a product and let it go out of the gate and it gets marketed. It doesn't happen any more. You've got to know what your market wants, and you've got to grow to that market."

Key advantages for primary producers in Mildura were viewed as 'Land and Water': good land, a secure and good quality water supply, and buoyant markets for products. Isolation from markets was viewed as a disadvantage, but there was considerable discussion of the prospects of extending the runway at the airport in order to export directly to Asia. "The land makes the city run" was a common observation from respondents, and the prosperity of Central Business District businesses was viewed as inextricably linked to productive harvests in the irrigation district and dryland farming area. The prospect of poor grape and wheat harvests in 1997 caused concern about the viability of some businesses in the following year.

Whilst many respondents still maintained a philosophical approach to farming, viewing it as a lifestyle reliant on providence, a new generation of farmers was reported by respondents to be emerging in the irrigation districts who had a more "corporate" approach to farming. The move to mechanisation of harvesting in the irrigation district, and direct sales of grapes to the local wineries also engendered what some felt was a 'factory' approach to farming.

The decline in the dried fruit market made producing wine grapes an economically attractive option, and the dried fruit market and the Australian Dried Fruit Association (ADFA) was in a period of great change at the time of research, and observations by members of the Country Women's Association and insiders in the industry came to the same conclusion: the end of home baking, and competition from the middle east, had been disastrous for the dried fruit industry. One respondent commented:

"The industry is struggling with the concept that home baking is disappearing. And ladies traditional role of buying a packet of mixed fruit, going home and making their own fruitcake for dad in the cupboard when he comes home at lunch or whatever is going too. My mum did that for years, I grew up with it, but I don't eat fruit cake anymore... So the industry is coming to terms with moving away from home baking and getting into manufactured products such as Sultana Bran...We need to find ways to get into the pockets of young people with high levels of disposable income available to spend on discretionary items."

Whilst the dried fruit market was perceived to be in perilous decline, the wine industry was perceived to be booming. Local wineries, notably Southcorp and Mildara Blass were major employers, and respondents felt that until what many felt would be an inevitable 'bust' arrived, wine would support the region. Many respondents, however, had reservations about the development of large-scale wine grape properties, particularly the recent development at Lake Cullulleraine, as they supported smaller family farm production, rather than 'industrial scale' production.

Tourism is also a major contributor to the Mildura economy, but many respondents felt that after the collapse of the 'gambling-tourism' market, that tourism would inevitably decline. Others, however, felt that new tourism ventures would play a critical part in the future of the region.

Although only a minority of respondents made a connection between environmental issues and a successful economy, but salinity, pests, weeds, soil erosion and river pollution were all potential environmental threats to the local economy. Many respondents expressed their concern about what they perceived to be the declining water quality of the Murray River for swimming or other recreational purposes.

Mildura is a very diverse community, and respondents, notably younger respondents, commented that people in Mildura could 'choose their own lifestyle', and that it was a community of 'interconnected communities'. A strong sense of identity was still associated with particular areas - people from Redcliffs and Merbein and the Mallee were perceived to form distinct communities, but identity and community life was also perceived to be closely linked to individuals' ethnic backgrounds, professions, or sporting or club associations.

There was also a sense of a 'local' community, of people who had been born and bred in the area, different 'ethnic' communities who had migrated to Australia and established themselves as local ethnic communities, more recent arrivals, and the transient communities linked to harvesting. Therefore, when people spoke about social and community lives, it was at a variety of levels. The views of respondents on these issues are summarised below.

06.1 The "Local" Community

The people who expressed most contentment with life in Mildura were people who had lived in the area for all of their lives. Respondents reported that there was an unusually high level of youth retention in Mildura, factors attributed to the distance to tertiary education, the reported family-orientation of Greek-Australian and Italian-Australian families, and the social isolation which allegedly led to an inward rather than outward social perspective. One respondent commented that in Mildura:

"You feel comfortable. That's something you miss in the city. Nobody knows you and you sort of have to explain yourself all the time. Here you don't have to explain yourself, people know you better than you know yourself."

This local knowledge linked everyone in the town, and the depth and extent of knowledge of individuals in the community was remarked upon by respondents. Individuals were invariably contextualised by the reputation of their family, and reputations, and good or bad deeds, were reported to 'stick' to people for a lifetime. When referring to confidential assistance for families in crisis, and the need for discretion, one respondent commented on the gossip in the town, which was not always accurate or kind:

"There are always people doing things very quietly. And it's really important in a country town that no one else knows about it anyway, because things travel so fast around Mildura, and usually backwards."

06.2 Social Cohesion in Mildura

Respondents reported that it was easy to fit in Mildura if you were married with children and had strong sporting connections, and it was easier still if the family had local connections. One woman commented on fitting in by saying:

"The thing you notice when you move around. If you can establish yourself as a somebody, it's easy to fit in, if you're related to someone, or if they know someone from where you come from, people take to you instantly. Whereas if you're a nobody, people don't take much notice of you, and you really find it hard to fit in."

Similarly, another respondent commented that "If your husband worked, you didn't, you didn't have kids, and you weren't very sporty, you'd be pushing up hill with a pointed stick [if you were trying to fit in] I feel."

Several respondents suggested that the high level of migration and the transient nature of a significant proportion of the population, meant that 'established' local women and men were sometimes reluctant to invest time in making 'new' friends. 'Local' women in the area had groups of friends that had been close since school days, and some respondents reported that it was difficult to make friends in Mildura. Others suggested this situation was typical of any country town in Australia:

"That's been there since time immemorial anyway, in any district. I mean if you move into a new district and you don't get out of your house, you're not going to meet anyone are you? Which is probably why our parents played tennis and golf and cricket and all went to CWA."

Even 'local' women who have moved away to the area and later returned, however, reported that 'fitting back in' to the community was not as easy as they had envisaged.

06.3 Community Spirit

When asked to comment on community spirit and support, or 'community mindedness' in Mildura, respondents commented about a variety of issues. Whilst the older respondents, and organisations such as CWA were very community minded and strongly supportive of friends and relatives within their community organisations, younger respondents suggested that community spirit was there if you wanted it, but was an optional part of life. A respondent active in community organisations commented: "You do things for community, you do things for other people, it's just normal country living", whereas younger respondents many respondents emphasised their desire for independence and privacy, something that some older respondents found difficult to understand.

Two respondents suggested that receiving community support in times of trouble was dependent on having location connections or sporting links:

"They hear if someone else is in strife, particularly the closer friends. It builds I suppose from their family histories, occupations, or sports. I don't know how caring the community would be about people who are relatively new, I don't mean that they wouldn't care, but they might not know."

"It's a fairly big area, if you didn't tell people, they wouldn't know. That depends on what you do."

Strong stereotypes about community mindedness in rural towns, however, contrasted with the realities faced by several respondents who had found that due to their unconventional social situations they had not 'qualified' for community support. One respondent commented on the difficult facing people in Mildura who were outwith the support networks:

"The rural notion is that these communities look after their own, and that's very true. Mum goes to hospital, dad's got to hold down a job, and the neighbours start bringing round the casseroles, and minding kids and all the rest of it. And that's great stuff, assuming you 'qualify'. However, if you're not 'socially acceptable', you don't qualify for that system, and you're probably worse off here than you would be anywhere else because there is no other safety net around."

Some respondents took a more cynical view of community support, and suggested that community support did not extend beyond distinct communities of interest:

"If a Koori family's house burns down, where's the community then? Turkish family, something a bit outside of the norm. How much of this community stuff do we see - basically not much."

06.4 Multiculturalism

Respondents viewed Mildura's Multiculturalism as a very positive aspect of the town, and typically commented on the diversity of cuisine and cultures that different migrant communities had brought to the area. The research was carried out in the year of the initial furore surrounding Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, and although a well attended One Nation meeting was held at Redcliffs, when asked about issues relating to Multiculturalism, all the research respondents expressed very positive views about Australia as a 'multicultural nation'. Many of the women interviewed expressed their sympathy for women who migrated to a new country where they did not speak the language. One woman commented:

"It's pretty hard for somebody coming into a new country when they don't speak the language. And I don't blame them for sticking to their groups. I would too."

Several respondents also recounted experiences of living or holidaying abroad, that had educated them about meeting people from other cultures. Significantly, several women also identified Hanson's arguments as 'simplistic' and detrimental to the Australian export market to Asia. One woman commented:

"The price we get for our oranges is determined by world trade, not by whether we've got x number of migrants, or haven't got x number of migrants, or whether we've got women in the work force, or reasonably well off families receiving child care allowances at the same rate as what low socio-economic groups are. You know the world market says this price, and

that's that. People don't want to look to examine what really is the underlying issue, and just think 'oh get migrants out the country because they're taking away our jobs'. It sounds like an easy solution, and I think people think it's something they can deal with, whereas the globalisation issues, they can't."

Several respondents also suggested the Pauline Hanson debate was a 'smoke screen' to draw attention away from unpopular Federal government funding cuts.

06.5 Social Issues and The Future of the Community

When asked about the future of the town, key social concerns expressed by all respondents focused on 'families in crisis', notably linked to problems with alcohol, gambling and domestic violence. There was also deep concern about youth male suicide, which many respondents linked to the absence of positive male role models. The behaviour of male youths, and the presence of a 'gang culture' in Mildura, which brought about the suggestion of a town curfew for young people, was viewed by many respondents as symptomatic problems with parenting in the town. The other main issue of concern for respondents in relation to the future was aged care and isolated elderly people.

Respondents were relatively confident about the economic future of the area, but there was widespread concern about the future prospects for young men who had little academic aptitude and in past times would have taken up labouring work, or other low-skill employment. Significantly, young women were viewed by women and men as more adaptable, and more able to cope with the changing employment market, and therefore concern rested primarily with young men.

SECTION II

07 'RURAL WOMEN' IN MILDURA AND SUNRAYSIA

The voices of rural women living in towns are often not heard in rural womens' research, and 'urban rural women' who were invited to take part in this research often suggested that the research should focus on 'real' rural women, who were typically described as 'station women', or finalists of the ABC Radio Rural Woman of the Year Award. One woman asked me "Are we counted as rural women in the city of Mildura, or is it only on the farms who are rural women?", and another considered herself unsuitable for interview because, she said, "I'm not the glamorous sort of living on the land rural woman, I'm just like a city person, only living in a smaller place". European research has emphasised that the majority of women in rural communities are not farm women⁵, and therefore it seemed appropriate to look at the experiences of 'urban rural women' and their landward counterparts. Focusing on 'urban rural women', and women thought of as 'real' rural women, however, generated considerable debate by the people who contributed for the research. For example, one respondent commented:

"I think you miss out on some of that in urban rural areas like Mildura. There's sort of city women, there's rural women, there's really rural rural women, and there's urban rural women. And in some ways I think you miss out a bit. You know there's the ABC Rural Woman of The Year thing and you've got to have all this stuff on the land, well what about us? What about the urban rural women that do all sorts of interesting things for their communities or in their jobs or whatever. Perhaps they have been overlooked in that scheme of things. Yeah, I think so. It's like they don't exist you know. You're in no man's land or no person's land."

There was a general consensus that urban rural women had fewer immediate problems than women on the land, but increasingly as women farmers worked off the land, rural and urban life was perceived to be merging and women were facing increasing pressures to be 'urban' and 'rural'. As the interviews progressed, however, it also emerged that virtually all of the women interviewed had a close connection with the land, and urban rural women shared many of the ideals and skills, normally attributed to 'rural women'. Many of the women took their skills and talents for granted, and the ability to handle guns, livestock and horses were regarded as everyday skills, and whilst one woman noted that her endeavours to grow all of her own vegetables had not been a complete success, she added that "I still do preserves that any woman would do".

Respondents of all ages emphasised the diversity of women now living in rural areas, and respondents commented that in the past, a rural woman would have been thought to be interested in crafts, her children and grandchildren, and "would be always sort of creating the environment for the man to be the show". Rural women today were now finding a voice and confounding stereotyped views of women in general. Or rather, increasing their visibility in society. In a town which some alleged still revolved around "Men, Football and Beer", several respondents noted that women had *always* been present in Mildura and on the surrounding blocks and farms, but their contributions to local businesses and primary production had not always been recognised or valued, and to a large extent women were still the 'quiet achievers'.

A rural upbringing or time spent on the land was widely perceived to have engendered a common-sense and practical attitude in many of the women. When reflecting on the diversity of skills contained in a local CWA group one woman who contributed to the research commented:

"Maybe they are as I said 'Practical Ladies'. And we have got a core of ladies who have been brought up in the bush or even around here on blocks and things. Whether that comes out of necessity I don't know. In the bush you can't run out into the street and scream for help if something goes wrong, you've got to deal with it, and maybe that instils that practicality into you. You just get on and do it. It doesn't enter your head that you can't, because if there's only you to do it, you do."

These comments reflected a more general view that rural women were expected to be capable and practical, and cope with adversity. 'Coping' became a theme that runs through the project, and women who had had any sort of rural input into an upbringing tended to focus on the coping skills that rural life brought out. One

⁵ Notably the work of a Mary Braithwaite, who has raised the profile of women's issues in rural development in the European Union. Her influential report is Braithwaite, M. *Women in the Rural Economy: Summary Report of a study on the economic role and situation of women in rural areas of the European Community*, Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, Equal Opportunities Unit (DG V/A.3), 1993.

woman commented that after life in the bush, "you become more practical, and don't fly into a tizzy over mishaps and things that happen. You become capable in that way." Another positive attribute in rural women was perceived to be a naturalness, and honesty that people felt was obscured in the city. One woman commented: I'm a bush person and I hate all the artifice you get in cities. I like people to be natural and to be themselves, and all the pretence that goes on, I have no time for fuss. I don't put on side".

08 WOMEN, WORK, EDUCATION AND ASPIRATIONS

During the interviews women were asked to describe their work histories, and it emerged that there was a very different recognition of what constituted 'work', and how work was reflected in women's life histories. As a generalisation, for women under fifty, paid work was more of a defining feature of their lives, and although women over fifty generally had not had such a strong engagement with paid work, domestic, and unpaid and unrecognised work was a far greater defining feature of their lives. This section of the report therefore discusses issues around work: perceptions of change and opportunity, specifically relating to women in resource management, women in business, and unpaid work.

8.1 Talking about work

All of the women interviewed had a very strong work ethic, and believed in the value of hard work, but often did not identify much of the work they had done in their lives as 'work', and often only initially commented on the paid work they had done away from the home. Although it is a commonplace observation about women talking about their work, it is worth repeating that many of the women involved in the research project underestimated both the importance and scope of their working lives. For example, one woman who had spent a highly enjoyable 'working childhood' on a station, then worked on a variety of enterprises with her husband, raised several children, done the bookkeeping, and business administration for the land-based enterprises, made clothing for the family, catered for workers on her property, been engaged in numerous voluntary committees, then had a working life in town following her departure from the land, combined with voluntary teaching work and other community service work, summarised her working life by saying "I was general dogsbody, I must have made thousands of cakes, drove tractors, chased cattle and sheep, not much else." The tendency to underestimate or 'not count' their own work ran across the generations of women interviewed for the research.

8.2 Paid work

The women interviewed who had undertaken paid work demonstrated tremendous diversity in their work histories. The prosperous economy of Australia in the 1970s and 1980s had enabled women to move between jobs with ease, and the good availability of land meant that a high proportion of the women interviewed had been on the land for some of their working life. Motivation for engaging in paid work was again very varied. The women interviewed reflected the dramatic changes in opportunities available to women over time: some respondents were career oriented; some were the sole wage earner in the family (and had been for several decades); whereas others only worked in paid employment to generate occasional cash to contribute towards specific goals, usually related to supporting their children, for example in education.

The majority of the women commented on the unimaginable changes in their lifetimes in relation to work. Many women interviewed had been expected to resign from their jobs when they married, and had been paid less for doing the same job as their male counterparts before they married. Women recounted that until recent times, they were expected to go home and "look after" their husbands, and some women noticed the irony that particularly on blocks and dryland farms that twenty years ago women were criticised if they worked off the land, and now they were criticised if they did not work off the land to bring in an income to support the business. Many women were concerned about their perception that younger women were not aware of the struggle for equal treatment for women in the workplace, and one woman commented that now that the doors were wide open for younger women, they were not aware of the achievements of older women.

Respondents also reported about the high number of women being employed in the 'cash/informal economy'. In general, and notably during the picking season, the informal economy thrived in Mildura: cash-in-hand payment was allegedly commonplace, and respondents reported that there was resistance to union membership or organisation in the town. Several respondents repeated the widespread view amongst employers, that employment legislation favoured workers too greatly, and that unfair/wrongful dismissal legislation should be amended in favour of employers.

Constraints for women who chose to do paid work were still apparent, and women spoke of the need to strike a sensible balance between family and work life, and several respondents commented on passing up promotion to avoid losing time with their children. Combining parenting and working demanded a supportive partner, and many respondents stressed the need for workplaces to be more responsive to the realities of modern life, notably the positive aspects of men and women being closely involved with their children.

Many respondents commented on the connection between paid work and self-esteem. 'Recognition' and a 'life outside the home' provided through paid employment was reported to give women confidence and self-assurance: several older respondents commented on their daughter's wages covering only the cost of childcare, transport to work and some new clothes for work, but recognised their need to have an identity outside of the home.

8.3 Men, Women, and Work

When asked about differences in men and women's attitudes to work, in general terms, the majority of women suggested that women just "got on with what needed to be done", and for example, one respondent commented "a man can really say how great a job he did opening a cupboard door. It wouldn't even occur to a woman to remember that she opened it." Women's advantage in work was also asserted to be the ability to do more than one thing at a time, and this was reported to be a notable advantage in managing paid work outside the home, parenting, and work within the home. The ability to 'multi-task' was frequently identified as one of the central differences between men and women, and the majority of respondents were certain that men and women were fundamentally different in this respect. One respondent expressed what emerged to be a consensus view:

"Women are far more capable of doing several things at once, and that must be something in the make up. Men and women are different and you can never make them the same. I don't care what anyone says, they are different."

Several women commented that they thought that 'social convention' put limits on what women were expected to achieve in work. One woman who had had a very diverse and successful career in the paid work force commented that her confidence came from her bush childhood, and a 'rural Australian' outlook on life:

"I feel fairly confident in anything I try. I know I'll give it my best, and if doesn't work out I don't think it will be because I haven't tried. And I think it is an Australian thing, and I don't think a lot of women are like that unfortunately, but I think that's what society makes of women too. So I'm one of them: I don't think a male can do anything better, better than a woman, but the women aren't given the chance to do it, that's my way of thinking, and I'm not a liberationist either, so it's just the way I was brought up."

The respondent above thought that women's chances were limited, and other respondents commented that when women were successful or were building towards success they were rarely encouraged in the male-dominated work environment. For example one respondent commented that a successful female rural entrepreneur was reported to be 'taking on too much' when expanding her enterprise, despite the evident prosperity of her business, while a neighbouring male property manager was described as 'go ahead' when he was expanding a less prosperous venture.

It was significant that whilst respondents emphasised the need to enable women to reach their full potential in work, the majority of respondents also emphasised the need for young men to have to work to 'keep them on the straight and narrow'.

8.4 Education and Expectations

All respondents were asked about their education and expectations of life, and how that had affected their life course and career, and there was a strong assertion from all respondents not only relating to the importance of education but also the critical impact of their parental expectations in relation to careers. Many women respondents noted the radical difference between what had been expected of them as children, and what could be expected of their children or grandchildren, and many respondents challenged the options given to them through their schooling. Two other women remarked on the change over time in terms of expectations of parents and children:

"Things have changed utterly now, because girls can do anything. I think the only expectation of girls in my day was that they would get married and have kids virtually."

"I guess we came from a different era where we weren't encouraged to go and follow our dreams, and I didn't even have any. "

The virtually universal experience amongst respondents aged between late 30s to late 70s was that when they were growing up, they were told that the options for women were to aspire to gain a nursing or teaching bursary, or to work in a shop or bank, or work as a secretary. The absence of grants for tertiary education had prevented many of the older respondents from following their ambitions at University, and these respondents were particularly critical of what they perceived to be the unjust criteria for the allocation of Austudy resources to country families. At careers evenings, respondents as young as in their late 20s and early 30s were told that they could be nurses or teachers only, and one young parent commented that she was shocked when she arrived at the hospital to start her nursing training because she rapidly realised she could have been a doctor: her grades were good enough, but it had never been mentioned to her as an option.

The alleged 'drift' of current teenagers and young people in their early twenties, was contrasted to the firm direction given to many respondents by their parents. Many respondents commented that their fathers had not approved of education for women, and it was common for respondents to describe their first job choice by referring to their mothers arranging work either in their local towns, or in Melbourne. One commented that "All mum could see at the end of it was a cushy well paid job" after her mother arranged a secretarial job despite her desire to do something different, and several respondents commented that their mothers had decided that they would not be able to cope with the job of their choice, or ended their education early to establish them in secretarial or clerical positions. A woman in her forties views were typical of her age group:

"My parents never encouraged me to go on to school, to go on to further education. I just decided that's what I wanted, and I fought tooth and nail to get that. I think that if they had said to me 'we want you to have academic aspirations', if they'd said to me 'we want you to go on to University', I might have been more academic, and tried to aim even a bit higher. Because in those days girls only aimed to work in a bank, that was perhaps the highest thing that girls thought about maybe, or what else, a nurse. They were the things that girls would aspire to, and very few girls aspired to going off to University or any further education of any kind."

Respondents, however, stressed the importance of having made the most of whatever opportunities were open to them, and many had benefited from taking courses as mature students, or coming to a realisation that they could be more personally fulfilled by having a career alongside the life that had been laid out for them. One woman described the start of her paid working career as an interest in the wider world:

"Back then I thought life was about, you know, having a job, and in time getting married, having a family. That was my life. And I imagined myself always being a teacher's wife, always having children around. Being a mum, being a CWA member, being at home. But in my heart I knew I was different because I would go to pre-school meetings and say 'I read this in the paper the other day, what do you think about that?'. And they would say 'God, what's she doing'? And I would think 'why don't they read the paper?'"

Ironically, as several respondents challenged the roles chosen for them by their mothers, and moved on to success in a new workplace situation, or into further education, they commented that they were surprised by the support their mothers gave them. Many older respondents contrasted the preparation for domestic life they had received with the broader education now available for young girls, and respondents from the older generation emphasised their acceptance of the lives they had had, while at the same time supporting younger generations to take up the different options open to them. After detailing the achievements of her 'high-flying' grand-children, one woman commented on her own life:

"You don't have a choice, so you just go along I think. You take life as it comes. The opportunities weren't there, I couldn't [do anything different], and so you didn't worry too much about doing other things. You got on with what had to be done. There's no good crying after spilt milk or wishing things were different."

Government policies of the 1980s had enabled some respondents to combine work and further education through paid study leave which offered excellent opportunities for rural women, and at a more local level, mothers involved in home educating their children, or supporting their children through school or university

also reported being encouraged by their children to further their own often very limited formal education, and many respondents emphasised that it was never too late to continue with learning. The 'University of the Third Age' was also given considerable praise, and many women referred to their educational pursuits as a personal achievement in making space for themselves to learn often after a lifetime of serving other's needs.

The emphasis on formal education was, however, also seen as a disadvantage by some, and several respondents were disappointed that potential employers were so focused on "paper qualifications" that they were unable to recognise life and work skills through work on the land, or through running a small business that were not backed up by "bits of paper". Women felt that a lack of what is referred to as "Recognition of Prior Learning" disadvantaged country women, notably women on farms.

Mothers and grandmothers were thrilled to see their own daughters and granddaughters achieving in education and taking opportunities that would have been unimaginable in the 1960s and 1970s, and even 1980s. It was significant that many respondents made very telling comments about education and how it gave women economic power. At the Victorian rural women's gathering one woman commented that if she had had an education she would never have stayed in an abusive relationship for as long as she did because she would have known that she could have supported the children. For the majority of respondents education was not only about knowledge, but also about enabling women to improve their own and their family's situation.

09 WOMEN WORKING ON FARMS

Rural Women's research to date has focused on women on farms, largely because they have been at the forefront of the Rural Women's Movement (see 22.1), and because they are a distinctive group of women who have faced numerous challenges to their industries over the recent past. A central focus of research and policy work has been the drive to recognise and acknowledge women's work within the primary industries, and many respondents noted that women had always been working on farms, but it was only when women began to take over what was traditionally viewed as 'men's work' that their contribution was noted.

09.1 Women's work on farms - past to present

Respondents reported radical changes to rural women's work on farms: women's experience on farms ranged from a time of no running water, electricity or telephones with women working to support vegetable gardens and house cows, to women working in what was formerly 'men's work' on tractors and large machinery or working off farm and supporting a new 'town lifestyle' in the country. Virtually all of the women interviewed had some connection with the land and all emphasised the importance of valuing women's contribution to farm work both within the farm family and in the wider community.

Respondents commented that marriage and work on a farm was both a commitment and a lifestyle⁶ and emphasised that women have always been working hard on farms. Several respondents noted that they had been farmer's daughters and therefore grew up with the certain knowledge they did not want to be a farmer's wife having seen the work their mothers had to do. Women who had been involved with farming and horticulture enterprises reported that there was an expectation in the past and in the present that women would always be on call to work on the farm. This in itself was not viewed as a problem, but women of all ages expressed their irritation that women's contributions to primary production was not valued, and their power within the farm and horticulture businesses was limited.

One woman commented on the 'old style' farming arrangements whereby:

"My husband always said that what happened inside the garden gate was my problem, and what happened outside was his. And that was pretty well how we worked really."

Inside the garden gate, however, included all catering, bookwork, parenting, housework, business administration and education of the children. Women who had retired from farming said that they never questioned their role, and one woman commented, "we accepted it, we were working for the farm all the time. Whatever needed doing, we ran for it". Skin cancers developed from a life time working outside were one side effect of the hours of work outside, and discussions of outside work on farms often led to discussions about work on the farms whereby a normal day of work would be a full day's work outside followed by housework through the evening. One woman commented that it was not unusual for her to be awake at

⁶ None of the respondents had farmed alone, and respondents reported that the situation of a woman farming alone was unusual in the district.

5.30am to do chores before the children woke up, driving tractors all day, and to be washing floors and cleaning at 10pm, a schedule which at the time she thought of as normal.

Respondents also confirmed that women on the land doing 'men's work' extended back as far as settlement in the region. One woman said that her father had no sons and so taught her to drive a tractor, and as she could do it, her husband expected her to continue. The pressure on working farm women was reported to still be intense. One woman interviewed felt compelled to work extra hours to 'allow' herself a day off, and several respondents reported that women on farms were pressured by their husbands and their mother in laws to contribute to the household income through off farm and on farm labour in addition to caring for children. Women highlighted the difference between being in a situation where a business partnership was formed with a farming husband, based on respect and pooling compatible skills, and a business partnership based on an expectation of servitude from women married to farmers.

Several women noted that younger women were not prepared to marry male horticulturalists or farmers who could not support their lifestyle expectations. Increasingly, women noted, the days of having 'a strong back and block of land' were sufficient neither to make a living or attract a wife. One respondent commented on the transition from dried fruit production as a way of life, to wine grapes as a business proposition to support a more corporate lifestyle:

"Horticulture has really changed in the region. Dried fruit was a way of life, whereas wine grapes are a commercial decision. You're going to make money out of them and so people are demanding more of dried fruit in terms of being able to make a living, you know, a good living, and support a lifestyle they want...With changes to telecommunications, the world-wide global village sort of thing, you know people are more open to ideas, willing to travel, more communication, get more idea about the world, and if they want to do that, they need the money to support that. So they demand more, it's not just a lifestyle, they want a reasonable income to send kids to school, clothing for kids...yeah, a dramatic change, just in people's expectations."

09.2 Women and decision making on the farm

Women both on and off the land discussed problems relating to women's place within the farm business and with decision making on the block. Respondents reported that any mothers of farmers relied on the block for their incomes and retained controlling interests in the property even after they had physically left the properties, and tensions between mother-in-laws and wives was reported to be commonplace. Several respondents suggested that it was not unusual for farm business financial arrangements to be designed to withstand the economic penalties which could theoretically be imposed by a divorce, and several women who contributed to the research at rural women's gatherings reported that they had not been privy to any financial discussions until after the death of their mother-in-law.

Conversely, from a mother-in-law's perspective, fear of 'having to sell the block' in the event of a divorce often played on the mind of the mother-in-laws, and at the rural women's gatherings in casual conversations several women expressed their concerns about their sons taking up with the "wrong sort of girl".

Even when women were clearly committed to a farm business and contributing their income to support the household, they reported that it was not unusual for women to be criticised by their mother in laws over household expenditure. One respondent, for example was criticised by her mother in law for wasting money on vitamins for herself after a serious illness. Critically, several respondents suggested that women were often not informed that it was their wages that was keeping the block or farm business afloat, and one respondent said that if a wife walked off a block or farm, it was not unusual for a farmer to be struggling to find money for day to day expenses. One respondent commented:

"Usually they're trying to find out how they can get money to survive. It might have been that the wife was earning income that paid the mortgage. All her wages might have been going to pay the mortgage, and if she shoots through, there's nothing left to pay the mortgage. And they've already got a debt, and he might not be able to borrow more, they just have to sell the farm, and whatever the family settlement turns out to be, work it out that way."

The possibility of women changing attitudes or introducing new ideas to the farm was viewed as virtually impossible by the majority of respondents. One woman commented that "It's really hard because a lot of them are very traditional: they like to do it like how their Dad's did it", and several women commented that

women's suggestions for business improvement were often ignored. One woman noted how her initial attempts to contribute to the farm business had been dismissed, and thus despite working full time on the farm she felt she had lost interest:

"Well my husband makes the decisions basically. I've really lost interest in the farm as a business because he makes the decisions. I had some bright ideas, or so I thought, maybe for the first 20 years, but he made the decisions anyway because he'd been here all his life - His dad came out and helped him, and they shared. It was a joint ownership of the farm, and I wasn't in that. So really from the start I didn't have a say, and I lost interest really. Because what's the use of having bright ideas if no one is going to take any notice of you?"

Another respondent commented:

"The women on the blocks, even the younger women, are just seen as workers. And they work very very hard, and their opinions are not valued. Beyond mothering and maybe on the type of grapes planted. They are squashed. The men rule the roost. They expect breakfast, morning tea, lunch, dinner. With very little input from them. And expect kids to be clothed and fed."

Women also reported problems over allocation of disposable income on blocks. Several respondents questioned the wisdom of relatives or friends' husbands buying prestige cars when household finances were tight, and were concerned that 'keeping up appearances' took vital money from the household accounts. Indeed, respondents also reported that whilst women were prepared to face up to financial realities on the block, men were often resistant to dealing with financial failure, which sometimes led to hardship for their families. One respondent commented:

"People treat it as a lifestyle and not a business. Yeah that's right. People will stay on their block because that's the lifestyle they want to live, they want to be out on the block, and you know, out of town, self employed, just potter around you know, and that's why they'll persevere for a lot longer. If they were running it as a business they'd see straight away, that you know, there's no point. It's an emotional commitment...You find in some cases where it's the woman who can see realistically that the property has had it, there's no way they're going to make money and they want off. And the fellow will be determined to stay because he thinks he's put all his hard work into it. It's a fairly common situation actually."

09.3 Women in Agricultural Leadership

Encouraging women to enter leadership positions on boards and industry bodies is a government priority, and some respondents asserted that any woman in Sunraysia who wanted to contribute to the industry could contribute, and noted that although there was nothing to encourage women to participate more fully in the agricultural leadership roles, there was nothing to discourage them either. In relation to the ADFA, one grower commented:

"Anyone who is free, able and willing, who wants to, can participate in an ADFA branch. And we have a *few* women. Certainly the participation rate isn't very high, but there's a few prominent women who are involved at all levels. If they're capable and willing to take the next step up in terms of going from a branch or state or federal level organisation as we are, and their peers are willing to elect them - everything has to go by election..."

One industry representative commented on the impact of directives coming from government, and emphasised the existing mechanisms available for men and women to become industry representatives:

"A number of times we've received directives from the Federal Government and Ministers, particularly equal opportunities, with that portfolio indicating that we'd like to see women encouraged and I suppose we in no way directly encourage them, but we in no way directly discourage them. If they're willing to take up the running, they can stand [for leadership positions] at a branch level. How they perform there will determine whether they go any further. And if their application were received for any peak industry body they'd be treated as equally as well anyone else."

It was accepted by many respondents that women did not feature strongly in the Dried Fruit or Wine industry either at ADFA local branches or other peak bodies, and this was not viewed as a problem. Significantly in a comparable situation where women dominated a particular committee one respondent said the committee was concerned about the high number of women on the committee, whereas respondents reported that male-dominated committees were rarely, if ever, regarded as problematic. One respondent typified a commonly held view, again emphasising the invisibility of farm women's work by saying:

"Locally I guess the Dried Fruit Industry is an all male run organisation, but then it's then men that are doing all the farming, so personally I don't have a problem with that. Some women might, but I don't."

A male respondent asserted that women lacked "confidence" in putting over their views, and he noted that there were women with talent, and there were women who could talk over business issues, but he felt that they did not have the necessary skills to participate in 'leadership'. Other respondents suggested issues such as lack of childcare at meetings and men's perceptions that 'wives and mothers' should not get involved in agri-politics was a more significant factor than the alleged lack of talent among women. One woman who had been interested in becoming active in local agri-politics was put off by the atmosphere at the local meetings, and said:

"Maybe some of the fellas thought it wasn't quite the right thing for a little mother to do, I don't know, I just have that feeling."

Another woman suggested that men were unwilling to look after children at home, or prepare meals for themselves or their children, if their wives became involved in this type of activity, a problem relating to perceptions of parental responsibility with farming families with younger children. One respondent noted:

"The younger ones are busy with their families, but the ones a little bit older than that, I think they're taking part more, going to the meetings and having their say. Not as much as the men do, but someone has to be home with the kids, and it's the man who doesn't stay home."

In addition, respondents asserted that agri-politics was still generally viewed as 'men's business' with 'women's business' being in the home. One male respondent commented that, although it was not necessarily a good situation, he did not see the status quo changing:

"I think traditionally men have taken the role of being involved in industry politics and the women are the homemakers, we all know the scenario. I don't think it's going to change."

Several respondents asserted that although women had recently been successful in the Rural City elections, in order to elect women to positions of leadership in primary industries, high profile men would need to be seen to be backing women candidates: respondents asserted that unless this happened women simply would not be elected, and thus never be able to prove their abilities. A further concern was some men who contributed to the research suggested younger women (i.e. recent graduates, or women up to thirty years old) would be 'qualified' to take part in the industry, but saw no imperative to include women with a life time of experience in the industry in their 40s, 50s or 60s, in the industry bodies or committees.

09.4 Women and The "Agricultural Crisis"

As noted above, women were reported to be more prepared to face up to financial problems on the farm either relating to an individual business problem, or as part of a wider drought situation. Ironically, although respondents asserted that women were not recognised in times of prosperity, many respondents felt that women were expected to be 'strong' and show a 'leadership role' in times of crisis. One respondent commented that during times of crisis in the agricultural industry:

"The women really come to the fore as the strength of the family, while the man falls apart worrying about the finances and that: Mum stands up as the backbone."

Many women asserted that women were expected to 'cope' in these situations, and to take the lead in seeking financial support. One woman commented:

"If it was left to the men, they'd say it's too hard, I don't want to know about it. But it's the women that are the ones that are trying to pay the school fees, put shoes on the kids' feet, food on the table, they know that they have to do something if they want the money. So they

might be reluctant, but they know they have to do it. So, they are probably more realistic about the situation, generally speaking, than the men."

09.5 Women in Landcare

Women have been very prominent in Landcare throughout Australia, and have made a valuable contribution to Landcare groups in Sunraysia. One respondent summed up Landcare by saying:

"A lot more people these days are coming to realise that we're the keepers of the land for future generations. Like we're not here to stuff it up for them."

Several other respondents thought Landcare was a continuation of the existing co-operation within the dryland farming communities. One respondent commented:

"I think up in this part of Victoria the communities are very strong in a way. There are no hobby farmers, as I said earlier, and everyone knows everyone and they feel isolated, and they work together on all sorts of committees, dozens of committees, like bus committees, school committees, cemetery committees, football committees, just so many things you can be on if you're a farmer out there. I think Landcare came along, and a lot of Mallee farmers said 'but we're already doing this on our own, perhaps we can do it better if we get together and talk about it.'"

Women were prominent in Tree Groups in dry land Landcare groups and played a prominent role in the Landcare group in the irrigation district.

09.6 Farm Safety

Farm Safety was an issue that concerned many respondents with a close or distant connection to the land. Children on farms were an essential part of the work force and therefore many women felt that it was essential to make them 'farm or block safe'. When this was done safely it was viewed as good parenting, and good experience for the children, for example, one woman's daughter was able to drive at age 8, and learned expert catering skills by the age of 12, and constantly 'pitched in' in a safe environment on the farm. Her mother stressed the practical need for her daughter to be able to drive in the event of an incident in a remote paddock. The practicalities of life on a block or a dry land farm were viewed pragmatically by many parents including one mother who commented:

"Let's face it, children are a vital member of the work force on a property, whether it's dry land property or out in the sheep or wheat area. During harvest time children are really expected to drive and to do certain chores which take a lot of responsibility. It is driving heavy machinery. It might be driving themselves to school because Dad's out. My children, both of them were driving by the time they were 9 or 10, they had motorbikes from about 10, but I made sure that they were competent, and they had safety instilled."

Critically, however, problems arose when men allegedly maintained what one woman described as "this macho, fatalistic, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen" attitude, and when women were stressed by the pressures of work on the farm and childcare. Women were aware that they sometimes put their children at risk, and one of several women who recounted tractor driving with very small babies in a baby sling commented:

"They can identify it. We're not stupid, and I know when I was driving with my baby, it was not safe. My attitude probably was if we're going to die, we'll die together. Or I'm in control? I'm here, I'm going to protect it."

Women were, however, very concerned about the machismo and bravado which surrounded male attitudes to farm safety, and although industry publications⁷, Workcover, the VFF⁸ and independent publications⁹, and local initiatives supported increased awareness of safety, many women feared that it was only tragic

⁷ **The Window: Farm Business and Family Issues for Women in Agriculture.** Safety Issue - Summer 1997. A newsletter published quarterly by John Deere and Company.

⁸ **RIPPER: Rural Injury Prevention Primary Education Resource** produced by the Victorian Farmers Federation as part of Rural Safety School Resource project of the Farmsafe committee.

⁹ For example **The Farming Woman** a occupational health and safety 'Infoletter', produced quarterly by 'Page 2 Publications'. The inaugural spring 1996 publication aimed to "contribute to lessening the atrocious statistics that currently plague farming communities". The publishers comment, "It would seem that the many efforts in occupational health and safety do not appear to have made much of a difference to fatalities, injuries and the suffering that occurs on our farms."

accidents in the immediate family that caused attitudes to change: several women reported their surprise at the lack of public reaction to children's deaths on farms, and were concerned that prevailing attitudes in the community had come to take farm fatalities as an inevitable part of country life.

09.7 Women's Health Issues in Primary Production

Some women interviewed expressed their concern about the level of pesticide use in the irrigation district and alleged that chemical usage had contributed to high levels of childhood asthma, and affected male reproductive health. In addition although in general men were reported to spray chemicals, women still washed their overalls, and many were concerned about the long term effects of chemical exposure on their husbands and themselves. Several women also reported their perception that some birth defects were connected to pregnant women's exposure to chemicals whilst working on blocks.

10 RURAL WOMEN IN BUSINESS

10.1 Women in small and micro business

Women in Business, notably women in small business and rural women in business are growing in visibility and significance¹⁰, and Small Business Victoria has supported development and information relating to home-based business and micro businesses in country Victoria. Events such as the Women in Small Business lunch in Mildura, organised as part of Small Business May, were praised for their contribution in raising both the profile and confidence of women in small business. In addition the ABC Radio Rural Woman of The Year had done much to raise the profile of successful business women in primary industries in the region and state-wide.

Women in business in Sunraysia were reported to be expanding in the areas of service, health, computers, and personal services: and it was asserted by respondents that these were all areas where women's skills could be fully utilised. Respondents noted a dramatic change in attitudes in recent years to women in business: formerly it was asserted that women in business in Mildura were viewed as the "wives of rich men pursuing a hobby", but after the success of some 'pioneering' business women in the town, women were increasing regarded as successful entrepreneurs in their own right.

Several respondents highlighted the advantages of running a small or micro business, and although it was undoubtedly stressful, and had some pressures, a common view both within and outwith Mildura was that women running their own businesses had the potential to adapt their work to suit their lifestyle: most commonly combining earning a living with caring for children.

Women both within and outwith Mildura commented on schemes available to assist women into business, raising capital for business, and respondents praised the work of Small Business Victoria. The key problem associated with starting a business was that women perceived that the low capital 'cottage' industries that respondents asserted women were most commonly interested in, were allegedly not viewed as a priority by the New Enterprise Initiative Scheme or by bank managers. Several women in micro business who contributed to the research stressed that while government initiatives focused on production, growth and export (and concomitant high levels of financial investment) their interests focused more on satisfaction in work, self expression and generating subsistence or basic income from their business, with associated extreme fiscal caution.

Several respondents suggested that as well as achieving in 'big business' many women were interested in relatively low profit businesses, and that bank managers or lenders found it difficult to take women's craft industries seriously. One woman in Mildura reported the dismissive attitude one bank she approached for funding for a craft based business, and at the Women in Farms Gathering a speaker recounted her experience of being told by a man younger than her own children that his bank 'didn't deal in such small amounts' when she applied for a small loan. Undeterred, she gained a loan elsewhere, and went on to establish an extremely successful cottage industry, which supports both the family and the property.

The stereotypical view of 'business women in power suits' did not sit with the reality of a wide diversity of women developing an interest in business or continuing to run their successful business developments. Women felt their attention to detail gave them a competitive edge: respondents in business said that they

¹⁰ South Australian Women's Advisory Council, *Women in Small Business in targeted rural regions of South Australia. A report by the South Australian Women's Advisory Council to the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon. Diana Laidlaw, mlc, Adelaide:South Australian Women's Advisory Council, 1996.*

took a holistic view of their customer base, and constantly responded to consumer needs which ranged from sensitive price adjustments, to assessing cross cultural food issues. The support between women in business was also very positive and older women in particular commented on their delight in seeing young women succeed.

10.2 The Business and Professional Women's Club in Mildura.

The Business and Professional Women's Club provided a forum for women in business to meet and network in the town. The Mildura club held monthly dinners with a range of speakers ranging from motivational evenings to women's health forums.

Motivation for participation in BPW was reported by respondents to meet a need for business and professional women to meet and share experiences and knowledge, and to improve personal skills base through taking up responsibilities of office. Women involved in the group also valued the diversity of experience in the group and listening to the achievements of the other women, and thereby discovering new approaches to business or tackling workplace issues. BPW also provided an opportunity for women to commit to making time for themselves away from family and work pressures.

In Mildura, BPW had been going through a period of transition and several women who were members or attending meetings as guests suggested that the name of the organisation did tend to put people off joining, as possible members thought the organisation may just be aimed at senior business or professional women, or be a radical feminist organisation. The organisation was, however, aimed at ordinary women in the community, and members stressed that women from any walk of life were welcome to join BPW, and that people should not be put off by the name of the group. One women commented on the apparently common perception that it was a militant group:

"People also tend to think of it as a militant feminist group because of it's name. The last thing on my mind. We care about women's issues, but we don't go to the feminist side. We want equality not the opposite direction - not for women to dominate."

The reported benefits of being a BPW member ranged from an appreciation of the sociable evenings, to gaining confidence in interacting with people in the Club and in the wider community, notably in business negotiation and the knowledge promoted about the community and influencing change at a local and state level. BPW also campaigned on women's issues, and several respondents emphasised the importance of women working together improving the situation for women in the wider community.

BPW also provided role models of successful women in the community and thorough speakers 'showcased' local successful business women. It also promoted knowledge and reflection on networks and business practices in country Victoria and further afield. When working in a family business women were encouraged to think of themselves as partners in a successful business rather than 'working in my husband's business', and BPW encouraged women to value their experience and achievements in business: valuing their time and gaining a sense of their own importance within their work or business.

The importance of networking and devoting time to professional development was also stressed at BPW, and the group provided an important resource for women in business in the community.

11. RURAL WOMEN AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

The role of new technology in women's lives was very varied. Although 'Technology' was purported to have the ability to reduce women's work load, it could be asserted that the practical implications of technological innovation was not always what the policy makers and advertisers were promoting.

For example, telephone banking advertisements show a relaxed farm woman on the veranda talking into her cordless phone, with a small sheaf of papers and a coffee on the table in front of her. In reality the most positive aspect of telephone banking, one respondent commented, was the ability to bank at after midnight when the 'real work' of the day had been completed. The solid business advantage was to be able to use a touch tone phone to transfer money over night, and fit more work into the day, rather than reduce the amount of work.

It could also be asserted that Government understanding of new technology and the local interpretation of technological innovation remained on the same track, but travelling at different speeds. At one rural women's gathering, an exporter using the Internet to transfer daily orders from Asia to Queensland was trumpeted as a possible way ahead with technology, but whilst Mildura was very much 'on-line' and several businesses were successfully trading via the Internet, a prominent business leader also commented:

"The government says new technology is about doing business on the Internet, but we know it's about buying a new cash register and installing a cappuccino machine."

Respondents felt that it was critical that the government recognised that technology alone could not solve rural problems, and many were concerned that in some situations technology would increase isolation rather than create closer links between people. For example, the CWA at a State level raised the possibility that CWA Group Presidents in remote areas could participate in Group President meetings through 'tele-conferencing'. At the Mildura Millewa Group Conference many of the delegates were aware of the technology involved in 'tele-conferencing', but expressed their concern that an already isolated CWA Group would become more isolated if the Group President was to be physically absent from the State meetings and therefore miss opportunities for networking and informal exchanges with other Group Presidents.

In addition, in relation to providing health services on line or via video, respondents appreciated the advantages, but questioned if loss of direct contact with a practitioner would be advantageous to people who were already isolated, and many felt that the impersonal nature of video links would also result in later presentation of diseases and illness by rural people.

Respondents also emphasised the difference between increased *information* and increased *knowledge*, and stressed that while the Internet enabled people to gain increased information about a particular issue, it did not alter the local context. For example, one mother with a child with special needs in Mildura was able to access hundreds of web sites with information about her child's condition, but had to lobby the doctor to achieve a referral for diagnosis in Melbourne, and ultimately had to relocate to obtain specialist services for her child.

Respondents did, however, recognise the power of information. One elderly woman said: "Information is very empowering: if you don't have any, you really are at everyone's mercy" and had educated herself about computers. She emphasised, however, that the government policy makers should be aware that gathering basic information remains a challenge for many people:

"The officials and the bureaucrats think that everybody can do this ['Surf' the Internet], and we *know* that some people can't even use the phone book. You know, some people can't read the thing, they don't know where to start in it, they don't know where to start to get help."

The Sunraysia Information and Referral Service had notably upskilled its volunteers to use computers, and due to the wide age range and backgrounds of their volunteers, they felt that this gave a very positive message that information gathering via a computer was an option for everyone.

At the Victorian Women on Farms Gathering in 1997 and at the Rural Australia Towards 2000 Conference, Marilyn Wearing, a leading New Zealand academic and farmer, emphasised that Primary Care was not provided by nurses and GPs, but by mothers, sisters and daughters. The largely unrecognised, and relatively unsupported, role women play as carers for family members who are ill or have a disability was emphasised by many respondents, even those who did not have caring responsibilities.

Respondents had been involved in 'caring' for family members stressed that it was a 'labour of love', and that family members who were caring for an individual received less financial support than 'professional carers'. The views expressed by respondents were also reflected in campaigns across Victoria in 1997, which publicised that the financial support and practical help provided by the government for carers (who were caring for relatives with disabilities at home) was inadequate. The Australian Institute of Family Studies summarised the situation in its report on families in Australia:

"As Australia engages with the effects of economic restructuring and globalisation and governments seek to contain expenditure on social and community programmes, there is increasing reliance on the private, community and voluntary sectors, and on families themselves, to fulfil care and support functions previously undertaken by the state. Low-income families, women and others reliant on government benefits are highly vulnerable to these changes, and much of the pressure created by limited social and economic resources is borne by middle aged women who are often stretched by the multiple demands of elder care, work force participation, and of providing support for young adult children and grandchildren as well as managing the bulk of domestic work."¹¹

Whilst good support was provided by organisations such as Carers Association Victoria, notably through the provision of high quality information¹², the depth of the problems facing carers was emphasised in the 1997 report 'Caring Enough to be Poor: A Survey of Carers' Income and Income Needs' produced by the Carers Association of Australia Inc. . The report highlights the severe financial disadvantages faced by individuals caring for people at home, and the high levels of stress facing carers.

The problems highlighted in the report were confirmed by several respondents in Mildura. Respondents involved in caring stressed that funding was required for the families providing the front line care rather than funding for support groups or education within the community. Whilst some respite care was provided locally, respondents felt that carers were not provided with adequate 'time out' from the constant demands of caring at home.

Carers were, respondents reported, invariably women. It was asserted that women were expected to be able to cope with the demands and responsibilities of taking on caring work, and respondents asserted women, and in particular women on farms, were expected to care for relatives, as town based members of the family suggested that they were "not working" on the farm and therefore would have time to contribute to caring.

Respondents and carers themselves were concerned about the impact of full time caring on their mental health, a concern which was confirmed by a 1997 report on the needs of women in Victoria's Mental Health service¹³ which highlights rural women as a disadvantaged group of carers, and notes that:

"Caring for a person with a serious mental illness or severely disabling condition can represent a significant burden for the carer, and the great majority of such carers are women. There is frequently a social expectation that women will take on a caring role for ill family members. In particular, women who are parents often feel particularly obliged to provide ongoing care for children and this can take a significant psychological and economic toll on women's lives...The strain can be exacerbated when carers have dependent children or other family members to care for, or if adequate supports are not available to them...The demands of caring for a person with a serious mental illness can pose risks to carers' emotional and mental well-being, and in rare circumstances, to their physical safety at times of psychiatric

¹¹ Australian Institute of Family Studies, **Australian Family Profiles. Social and Demographic Patterns**, Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1997, p.v.

¹² **Carer Support. Practical Information on Caring at Home.** A Federal Government Initiative, produced for the Commonwealth Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, by Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.

¹³ Human Services, **Victoria's Mental Health Service. Tailoring Services to Meet the Needs of Women**, Melbourne: Government of Victoria, 1997. Victoria's Mental Health Service Tailoring Services to Meet the Needs of Women, 1997.

Respondents who cared for adults or children with mental disabilities also felt that there was a lack of awareness of not only the problems faced by children and adults with mental health problems, but also the stress faced by their carers. Respondents suggested that an increased awareness of mental health problems, notably in children, would increase understanding of problems faced by families.

Several respondents stressed their concern for what they perceived to be the increased problems relating to boys from households with absent fathers, and what was alleged to be a high diagnostic rate of children with Attention Deficiency Disorder (ADD) in Mildura. Dr. Christopher Green, a high profile authority on ADD¹⁴ has observed that 'difficult men leave difficult children', often in the care of their mother, and the promotion of the drug Ritalin as a solution to behavioural problems in boys in households with absent fathers was viewed as problematic by some respondents. Steve Biddulph, a leading child psychologist suggests in 'Raising Boys' that "while not all instances of Attention Deficiency Disorder are really dad deficiency disorders...quite a lot are"¹⁵, and stressed the importance of behavioural strategies as well as medication in tackling problems boys experience, a view several respondents concurred with, noting again the important role men should take in 'raising boys' and young men.

13 RURAL WOMEN AND VOLUNTARY WORK

Some women respondents commented that they had 'never worked', but on further questioning revealed that they had worked in a voluntary capacity for all of their married lives. Many women engaged in volunteer work with nursing mothers, pre-school associations, and Mothers Clubs and later School Councils as their children progressed through education. In addition, many respondents did regular volunteer work for the Returned Services League and other men's organisations' auxiliaries.

The majority of the volunteers for the Sunraysia Information and Referral Service, Mallee Family Care and Meals on Wheels were also reported to be women, all of whom provided vital services in the community. Younger women appeared to have less time to devote to voluntary work, but the overwhelming majority of respondents felt that "country volunteers" both gave and gained a great deal from their volunteer activities. Some respondents reported that the skills they developed as volunteers on various committees (notably as young parents) enabled them to find employment later on in their lives.

Several women who were extensively involved in volunteer organisations were concerned that as decision makers and those making decisions about funding support for volunteer groups were predominantly men, they were unaware of the significance and economic importance of the work being carried out by predominantly women volunteers: some volunteers suggested that whilst women took a more holistic view of life, men were preoccupied with economic development issues, and one commented:

"Males make decisions about where the money goes to our 'little' organisations, but maybe males don't appreciate what we do? Another challenge for us is to grab men by whatever you grab them by and show them that what we do is as important as economic development and other stuff that men seem to be interested in. Their stuff is important for creating employment but there is this other side of life, a social justice side of life."

14 RURAL WOMEN AND CRAFT WORK

Craft work was hugely popular in Mildura. The town supported several craft shops, and craft classes, groups and workshops were extremely well attended. Women reported that they did craft work for a variety of reasons including fund raising, gift making, to develop craft skills to share with their children or grandchildren, or to earn additional household income. Women in craft groups suggested that they enjoyed the company of other women, and several respondents suggested that while there were women in the town who enjoyed recognition outwith the town for their craft skills, the majority of women just enjoyed the activity as a relaxation.

¹⁴ Dr. Christopher Green and Dr. Kit Chee, *Understanding ADD. Attention Deficit Disorder Family Issues* Doubleday: Sydney

¹⁵ Biddulph, S. *Raising Boys. Why boys are different - and how to help them become happy and well-balanced men.* Sydney: Finch Publishing, 1997.

Women who worked in demanding jobs, and women with young children, reported that craft work was a relaxation and something that provided a sense of achievement. One respondent commented:

"I've always done it, growing up on a farm where I was always taught to knit and sew. And then having kids, when you're tired and exhausted all the time, there's not much that you can do, but you can always knit and sew, and embroider. When you're exhausted and you lay back in your chair, and you think 'oh what can I do, I'm so tired but I've achieved nothing today, oh I'll do some cross stitch'. And you can do some mindless cross stitch, and you think oh well I've achieved something. And that's sort of been my outlet, and has satisfied my need to be doing something and achieving something. It's been my sewing and knitting. And I can sit back and I can be almost be asleep and can knit even the most complicated patterns as relaxation."

The Embroiders Guild and Patchwork Group had regular exhibitions of their very high quality work. Many respondents linked craft work with community service, and although attitudes to craft work were changing, a common view was that craft work should include a element of service to others. Although some women interpreted this as indicative of rural women neglecting their own needs, others emphasised the importance of craft work in the wider community, for example the work of the Sunraysia Patchwork Friends in supporting children in foster care, and the Mildura Base Hospital maternity unit, and the work of the CWA supporting women and children in the Pacific Islands.

Cooking was also discussed by some women as 'edible craft work', and many women commented on the lack of appreciation of food. This was a problem that several respondents felt was linked to families not eating together around the kitchen table. Several respondents also commented on the lack of attention to craft skills in the broadest sense of the word in the school curriculum, and felt that life skills, including cooking and sewing should not be dismissed as irrelevant topics for the contemporary world.

15 RURAL WOMEN AND SPORT AND LEISURE

Respondents noted that women's participation in sport in Mildura was very high, and women's support of sports clubs was critical to their success. Women's participation rates in sport in Australia are amongst the highest in the world, and many women reported a life long involvement with playing sport, sporting auxiliaries, in maintenance teams or on committees. Recent research¹⁶ has shown that women in rural areas still face considerable disadvantages in rural sport, and whilst respondents were pleased to note that women were increasingly playing sport in their own right as opposed to watching men play sport, there still was concern that women were persuaded to take a 'supporting' or 'spectator' role in sporting events.

Attitudes to the importance of women's leisure and sporting activities were changing, but several respondents commented that whilst men's sporting commitments were viewed as sacrosanct, women were still, on the whole, expected to fit their sporting activities around their family responsibilities. One woman commented:

"At one stage I used to think God in Heaven, I work x number of days per week, I've got the two kids, and I'm doing the cooking. At one stage I was mowing lawns as well, which is a total pain. But, if the husband was going out to a meeting or going to play sport, you had everything ready for them, and if you were going to play sport, you had everything ready for them, for when you went away, if you understand what I mean, which is pretty unfair to put it like that now, and I think those kind of attitudes are balancing out a bit."

In a town where many respondents felt that gender relations were not always positive, many suggested that the sporting clubs showed that men and women could work positively together.

¹⁶ Alston, M. *Goals for Women. Improving Media Representation of Women's Sport*, Wagga Wagga: Centre for Rural Social Research, Charles Sturt University-Riverina, 1996.

16.1 Changing Perceptions of a Woman's Place

"With my granddaughter, her mother often says to her 'it's a tough world kid so get with it and stay there'. It is a tough world for a woman, and I'm not sure it's going to change for a long time."

When women talked about making changes for women, they spoke about limitations for women, and the difference between the limits given to women by themselves and the limits that are imposed on women by 'society'. Respondents spoke of events that led them to challenge the limits of their lives and the successes and challenges this had presented to them. Whilst many respondents spoke about challenging the limitations for women in the home situation and within relationships, as the key challenges facing women, progress for women in public life was also seen as extremely important.

Whilst many women were very successful in community life, there were what sociologists describe as "normative values" for women in the community: community wide views of what it was and was not appropriate for women to wear, how they should behave, and what they should speak out about. Whilst these type of values change over time, respondents discussed the limits these place on women and the challenges faced by women who did not fit in with these community expectations.

Many women praised the "trail blazing" activities of women in the town who had 'broken into' formerly male dominated areas of public life and business, and praised women who had quietly built up successful businesses or other initiatives in the town, contributing not only to the place of women in the community but also to the wider economic prosperity of the area.

Several women had been strongly influenced by the work of Jenni Mitchell, one of the key workers in the Rural Women's Network in Victoria, and one respondent commented that: "Jenni Mitchell taught me how to observe the subtleties of discrimination and to understand that they are very real, but not necessarily intended, and how to break down those barriers". Several other women noted that despite visible progress, women still felt put down by small incidents that represented wider inequalities, and attitudes that suggested that women did not have the same competence as men. For example one woman commented:

"I still don't think there's equal opportunity, and by that I'm not talking about where a certain percentage of women have to have a certain percentage of jobs. I just mean there are different ways where women are still kept in control, put it that way, or still held down in a subtle kind of way. But how you teach your daughters and whatnot to cope with that, I don't know. As more women get into business, I think that will change. Going back some, you could be earning a salary etcetera, and go to the bank for a loan, and you'd have to get your husband to sign for it. Which I found was pretty appalling, not that it happened to me. The only similar time it did happen to me was when we were getting a loan to build our house, I'd sold my car, and rah rah rah, and the bank manager talked to my husband as if I wasn't there, and I thought hang about, what about me? And there are still things like that go on."

Social changes had, however, occurred within social venues and pubs which represented a softening of the division between 'men's space' and 'women's space' and country pubs were cited as good examples of just how much attitudes and social experiences had changed in recent times:

"In my own life, when I talk about Werrimul, Footy was a great social event, and we had a netball competition that went alongside that. And so, the men played football and the women played netball. And then the netballers watched the footy. And at the end of footy we'd all go to Werrimul, and the men would go in the pub, and the ladies would sit in the cars outside the pub. And there were a few women that actually drank in the public lounge, and those that drank were oh, God, 'bad women', you know. So it was all the women were sitting in the cars, or we'd go to a dance or a cabaret, and there used to be one every week. That particular pub, Werrimul, now is the most welcoming pub around, and it runs the most fabulous meals, and every meeting in the community is held there for any particular reason, and women are really comfortable walking in there. So it's been a real change in just 20 years."

Issues around confidence and self-esteem relating to women's ability to fulfil their potential in life, and not to be ground down by the circumstances they found themselves in still, however, played a major part in women's concerns about the place of women in the town. Women were concerned about the reinforcement of a sense of 'limits' for women and many respondents as the respondent below, described women as 'trapped':

"A lot of women are trapped, and I feel for them because I was trapped too. Women who haven't got a job, they've got children, they're trapped. I know we are financed or we can get pensions and things that we don't have to be trapped, but there are people that are psychologically trapped. Yeah. They're really the people that I'd like to help, yeah, so that they can have an opinion, and they can do things, they can create, for their own self worth. They are a multitude, really...So it's enabling them to get out and think that they have a role. make them realise that they are a valuable person in their own right, and they don't have to be walked over. But how do you help those women? We've all had to help ourselves to a certain extent...but its' encouraging people to think they can make a change. Different women I know, even if they've just got the phone link to talk to people. They talk about it, and then it doesn't seem a big problem any more. It's communication. So preventing people being so isolated in their own homes.. Isolated in their life. There is a need there, but how on earth you'd work that out I don't know."

Breaking out of a sense of being 'trapped' by social conventions, and a sense of women's own self-limitations was reported to come about through either personal fulfilment which ranged from music to mature education courses, but also by participating in women's social networks.

Womens networks formed around voluntary work Red Cross, CWA, Nursing Mothers, Playgroup, and School which focused on 'caring' aspects of society, but in recent years women have been moving into male-dominated business and professional networks.

16.2 Women on Boards

The absence of women on boards and other decision making bodies was seen as a disadvantage for the local community. Many women stressed the importance of having different points of view on committees, and rural women's activists have been campaigning to have 50 percent presentation on agricultural boards and statutory authorities by the year 2000¹⁷. One respondent stressed the importance of having women on boards:

"It's the same thing of having women on committees as well, because it brings a diversity of views. And I think that's really important, because otherwise you just get this boring old same male point of view, which is important, but, it's not the only point of view in the community."

There was a strong feeling that whilst individuals in the community suggested that women did not have the experience or qualifications for participation on boards, it was clear to many respondents that men were appointed because it was 'their turn' or they were perceived to be a 'good bloke' regardless of their qualifications. In addition, as mentioned by the respondent below, recruitment for appointments often took place through men using their traditional business or sporting networks:

"The one here is a prime example, when the Land and Water Management Plan was being set up, and they wanted a representative from this area, so the guy who was the chairman went to the men's golf one night, and asked a bloke down there if he'd do it. And that was the community consultation."

Several women asserted that many men in the town felt that women had nothing to contribute, and this assumption combined with the predominantly male composition of committees and boards was not conducive to including women's perspectives on the future of the area. In addition, several women commented that any women with "foreign" accents, or women with decades of experience but no "paper qualifications" were never considered for appointments, whatever their experience.

The various women's networks and organisations within and outwith Mildura demonstrated women were able to organise and work effectively together, and such action ranged from establishing a domestic violence

¹⁷ Margaret Alston p.81, *Backs to the Wall: Rural Women Make Formidable Activists* in *Social Change in Rural Australia*, Rockhampton: Rural Social and Economic Research Centre, Central Queensland University, 1996.

shelter in the town, to the Presidents and Secretaries of the local women's bowling teams organising a special 'campaigning day-trip' to Melbourne to prevent a change to their Pennant Day. Respondents were not, however, overly optimistic about increasing the visibility of women in public life, however desirable that might be. One woman commented in relation to women on boards:

"The day it's 50% will be wonderful. Day that it's 80% will be even better. We all might be dead by then."

Women also stressed women's recognition of a balanced approach to life, and many stressed that women only came to the 'front line' when there is no other choice.

"I was thinking about women taking leadership roles and things like that. I think that'll plateau a bit. I think they get on with other bothers...They do things a different way so they don't need to be the chairperson around different board tables to influence the change they see is important. They only come out on to the front battleground when there is no other choice I suspect."

16.4 The Role of the Country Women's Association

CWA is the largest women's membership organisation in Australia, and the Mildura-Millewa local group has 13 local branches. Members of the Carinya Branch and the Mildura-Millewa group contributed to this research, and their activities both confirmed many of the very positive aspects of the work conducted by CWA and confounded many of the stereotypical images of CWA ladies.

CWA has an ageing membership, which in Mildura ranged from women in their 50s and a few younger members, to women in their 80s and 90s. The several generations of women involved in CWA often commented that CWA had brought them together and the activities and friendships formed through CWA maintained close links between them. CWA is an organisation run by women for women, and for the benefit of the rural community. Although CWA is typically viewed as a very conventional, 'conservative' organisation, through practical action and work, the women involved at a local level were as 'radical' as many more contemporary women's organisations, and, it could be argued, more effective.

The Carinya Branch was well known in the district as a very friendly branch, with a morning meeting once a month, and a craft group which also met on a monthly basis. Reasons respondents gave for joining CWA were varied but included wanting to be involved in a non-political, non-sectarian women's organisation, enjoying other women's company and the educational aspect of CWA. The activities of the CWA were extremely varied and ranged from McDonalds Breakfast and Pizza Hut lunches to more traditional garden parties, and fashion shows. CWA members had extremely busy social schedules, and genuinely enjoyed the company and entertainment of the other women through speciality lunches, annual events such as the craft show, international day, the music and drama festival and many other activities.

CWA was undoubtedly "not just tea and scones" and had a strong charitable focus to their activities, working locally in co-operation with other local charities such as the Salvation Army and raising money for different annual projects at a Group and local Branch level. One member commented that the CWA "did so much good for so many people" and the work of CWA members extended beyond formal community-minded initiatives to a strong informal support network, not only for other members but other interconnected local people. In addition, for women who found it difficult to justify time for themselves through family pressure, CWA was a constant source of support and fellowship, the significance of which should not be underestimated. In addition, in a town where the stresses of many women and men's lives led them to feel unable to give support to others, many of the CWA ladies in Carinya and the wider Group certainly strove to live up to the words of the CWA collect¹⁸ and demonstrated remarkable kindness and care.

The monthly CWA meetings also encouraged members to develop new skills and build confidence, through taking on different responsibilities as office bearers. What would be referred to in the 1990s as 'personal growth' was achieved through learning leadership skills, and taking on new experiences which built up

¹⁸ Keep us O Lord from Pettiness, Let us be large in thought, in word and deed.
Let us be done with fault-finding and leave off self-seeking.
May we put away all pretence and meet each other face to face, without self-pity, fear or prejudice
May we never be hasty in judgement, and always generous
Teach us to put into action our better impulses straightforward and unafraid
Let us take time for all things, make us grow calm, serene, gentle
Grant that we may realise that it is the little things that create differences; that in the big things of life we are one
And may we strive to touch and know the great woman's heart common to us all; and O Lord God, let us not forget to be kind.

confidence and created a sense of learning and reflection within the group. The generations of women currently involved in CWA often had limited formal education, and demonstrated a remarkable enthusiasm for learning.

CWA are often represented as a quaint or 'out of touch' organisation. The Carinya branch, however, demonstrated that the CWA were very much 'in touch' with women's issues by supporting the Mallee Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Unit as the Branch's adopted charity. The work of the former CWA State President Jean Tom, in encouraging CWA to support domestic violence initiatives has done much to both raise the profile of the issue and to ensure that all political parties support funding for supported accommodation and crisis services. At the launch of the rural domestic violence kit (see Section III) John Anderson commented that "It was Mrs Tom who gave a presentation on domestic violence in rural communities at the meeting I convened with the Prime Minister and Minister Newman to mark the inaugural World Rural Women's Day last year. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Country Women's Association in highlighting the issue of domestic violence."

It is significant this work at a National level was paralleled by the very practical work of the Carinya branch in adopting the Mildura Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault unit. One respondent who was unconnected to the CWA, commented that their action was very significant in a town like Mildura. Her comment, "How 'conservative' a group do you get, and look at them addressing the issue," was echoed by several other respondents. Undoubtedly the CWA involvement in the DVSA unit in Mildura has also done much to assist in 'owning' the service within the town, as many people have trouble coming to terms with the recognition of domestic and family violence as a problem for rural communities.

During 1997, the Carinya branch also provided embroidered clothing for still-born babies at the local maternity unit. The new approach to assisting mothers deal with the loss of their children was praised by numerous respondents as extremely important and therapeutic work, and CWA saw a need and met it in a very practical and caring way: once again being a part of some very 'cutting edge' policies for women.

CWA members who have gone on to hold office at a Group or State level also gain important experience and knowledge that they can bring back to the community. In addition, although many people have a stereotypical view of CWA, the organisation wields enormous influence at a political level. Recent research by Dr. Karen Crook¹⁹ commented on the potential power of CWA, and the debate within the organisation about how to move in the future. Certainly the aforementioned work by Jean Tom shows that CWA can engage with potentially contentious issues, in addition to its solid grass roots driven community campaigning on issues that matter to ordinary people.

CWA has engaged with the 'rural women's movement', and individual members have done much to promote issues which impact on rural people. In addition the need to appreciate the knowledge and values of 'third age' citizens is important. For example, several CWA members who mentioned their concern over the use of plastic nappies for children as an aside to discussions over waste disposal at a CWA meeting, would probably find themselves surprised to be in complete harmony with radical young environmentalists who promote the adage "every disposable nappy that has ever been made is still on the planet".

One of the most refreshing things about the CWA ladies who had lived through hard times in rural Australia was their vigour for life and enthusiasm for knowledge and involvement in the economy and society around them. The CWA campaigned on issues they cared about for themselves and their families, and strangers who lived in their community. They and others in the community thought it was very important that people cared.

Younger respondents viewed the CWA ladies as representing a different social order and social time of permanence and more 'traditional' values: the golden wedding anniversaries celebrated by several CWA members seemed unimaginable to the younger generations of respondents. The overwhelming majority of people who contributed to this research, however, were greatly reassured that women who had driven tractors through war time, and pulled communities through hard times over several decades were still committed to building a better rural Australia for the future.

¹⁹ Karen Crook *The Politics Of Influence: The Work Of The Country Women's Association Of Victoria Incorporated In The Public Sphere*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Melbourne: Melbourne Business School. 1997

SECTION III

17 CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN IN MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

In the forward to Australian Family Profiles, Social and Demographic Patterns, the Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Harry McGurk comments:

"Families are often talked about as if there were only one ideal template from which they should be constructed. In reality, families are dynamic and complex entities, responsive to economic and social change in the overall milieu in which they are embedded. Patterns of family formation, in particular are changing. For example, both men and women are marrying later and having fewer children; more people are divorcing and living in de facto marriages; expectations for greater gender equity within families have increased; and more children are being borne and raised within less traditional family structures. Understanding of families needs to be informed by an awareness of the diversity of family forms and recognition of the different responses of family members to challenges along their life course." (Australian Institute of Family Studies, p. v, 1997)

When asked about the changing family values in Mildura, the majority of respondents expressed their concern about "families in trouble" and "families in crisis" situations. Mildura was quoted by numerous respondents to be the divorce capital of Australia and the challenges facing families in Mildura were viewed as indicative of wider problems in Australia with 'The Family'. One respondent commented that divorce and separation "does change the whole way of looking at families, we can no longer just presume that family is Mum and Dad and children, it's not." and many respondents expressed their own quandary over how to deal with the complex interactions of families.

Mildura's location as a 'cross-roads' community with a high transient population and a large number of families without extended family support added further stress to families dealing with day to day problems. Many respondents felt that although people viewed the conventional family as an ideal, the practical outworking of inequities within marriage, domestic violence, divorce, and absent fathers were placing unreasonable strains on women.

Respondents expressed a great deal of concern about families in crisis, and stressed the long term implications of marital breakdown, and in particular the impact of divorce on children. Several respondents stressed the need for children to grow up 'whole and healthy', and were very concerned about what they considered to be the lack of commitment and structure in society. People described it in a variety of ways, but one woman suggested that the lack of commitment in relationships could be attributed to a lack of common sense about 'what works'. One respondent commented:

"A lot of the locals seem to have lost their common sense that they had. The unit, the whole family group, it's now five little sections instead of the one section of 20. They've lost that community."

Another respondent reflected some respondents' assertions that the 'family tradition' was disappearing as friendship and family alliances were constantly shifting through relationship changes, when she commented that:

"I don't know what the next generation is going to be like. Nearly all the girls' friends, they're from split marriages. Who belongs to who? No one ever knows any more. It's so completely different. You just don't know really. I think people rely on, or get more help from their friends than family now because families are so split. There might be some special people in your family, but it's people helping people: it doesn't mean that it's not family helping family anymore. It's people helping people, yeah. That family tradition is going or gone. Hasn't it?"

Women were looked upon by many respondents as the central figure in the family and many respondents were concerned that social and economic changes had left men somewhat adrift. Women were reported to be the strength of the family, and the women were left to 'cope' and 'take responsibility' should the father leave the household, but were also perceived to be the least 'powerful' person within the family group.

Changes within attitudes to women and the division of domestic labour in the family, courting, marriage, changes within marriage, and divorce are discussed below.

17.1 Rural Women, Rural Men, and Housework

The division of household work and household skills between men and women was a contentious issue. The older generation of respondents had engaged in constant housework to maintain the household, and despite technological innovation and changes in diet and work patterns, respondents reported that women remained responsible for the majority of household tasks.

Significantly when discussing housework, the overwhelming majority of respondents reflected on men's alleged inability to "think laterally" about what needed to be done in the home, or perform more than one task at a time, and their alleged inability to anticipate what would need to be done in the event of disruption to routine. For example one woman commented that her son and daughter-in-law shared looking after the children after school: when it was her son's turn he looked after the children, whereas her daughter in law regularly managed to look after the children, put the washing on, and prepare the dinner.

Many respondents often wondered if men's brains "functioned differently", and several women who had attempted to raise their boys and girls in the same way wondered if a genetic disposition led boys to leave their clothes strewn around the house and resist assisting with meal preparation. Women appeared to think that many men were genuinely unable to structure meal planning, shopping, cooking and looking after children, and this view was reinforced by conversations between women commenting on men's alleged inability to cook, or cope with basic household tasks in their absence. Although this underestimation of men's domestic abilities may appear to be exaggerated, women gave numerous examples of problems with encouraging men to be more engaged with household duties, ranging from educating a widowed father to make his own cups of tea and coffee, to feeding pets. Several women also expressed concern about leaving men 'home alone' due to their reluctance to assume domestic responsibilities in their wives absence. Again, although these issues may appear to be exaggerated, they were reported as very real problems by respondents.

Some women theorised that after the second world war and the trauma of losing male members of the family, two generations of Australian mothers mollycoddled their sons, and then the men expected their wives to take the same role as their mothers. In several situations women reported that men still expected special praise for performing basic childcare and household tasks that women performed daily.

Respondents were aware of the responsibilities of mothers and fathers in educating their sons and daughters, but many felt that boys and girls were 'genetically programmed' at birth to behave in particular ways, a view reinforced by the different male and female sibling behaviours in households where the children were being 'raised equally'. Many respondents reported feeling exhausted by attempting to make their sons and husbands, participate in household chores, but felt that it was a important responsibility. Other respondents reported limited progress:

"I do see it changing. Even people my age - the husband cooks the meal at night. We are still trying to get there. Because he is just so tuned in to what he is doing at work, he doesn't realise. Not that he doesn't want to do it, just doesn't realise. Until recently he fitted in to that old thing of dad comes home, sits down watches telly or news. Didn't moan at the kids or anything - he's always had a lot of time for the kids. We're in the middle now. I can say now I'm going out this evening, you have to get your own tea. I refuse to prepare something for them. My son can be lazy, but he will have to learn. He will end up getting married and they won't put up with it. They have arms and legs and if I died tomorrow they'd have to look after themselves"

Although the younger section of the sample expressed a need for more changes, the older generations of respondents emphasised how much had changed since they raised their children in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. Several women asserted that the majority of men over 45 were 'beyond redemption', but stressed how much progress had been made by their sons. Men's involvement in ironing and cooking was seen as two indicators of real change, but it was asserted by mothers of sons who were now involved in parenting and housework that their sons had to defend their actions to other men, notably when they took a very active role in housework and childcare after the births of their children. Several mothers interviewed suggested working wives had changed the division of household labour and reported their surprise and pride that their sons were involved in the household.

Respondents emphasised the very positive aspects of women's work which revolved around food processing, and women emphasised their enthusiasm for the process of cooking and preserving. Respondents were very positive about cooking and preserving skills, and stressed the economic good sense of meal planning and cooking with 'healthy ingredients'. Practical knitting, sewing and craft skills were also seen as skills that were being lost to the younger generation, and several respondents felt that young people were being underestimated.

17.2 Courting

With the eldest respondents for this research project in their 80s and the youngest in their teens the radical changes in negotiating the early stages of a relationship, dating, courting, or 'going out' were clear. The oldest respondents contrasted young people's reluctance to commit for even short periods of time, (for example several respondents commented on the 'teenage crisis' of Debutante ball partners who split up prior to the ball), with the expectation they faced on marriage in their late teens that they were making a life-long commitment.

Respondents were concerned about the sexualisation of young teenagers, and even younger respondents were concerned that "Everything seems so speeded up". One mother commented that she wanted her sons to have steady relationships and was concerned about people "jumping from person to person". Many respondents prefaced such views with comments suggesting that their views were old fashioned. It was also asserted that a stable marriage was still the ideal, if an unattainable one. One respondent commented:

"Ideally, I believe in marriage and a happy relationship. To meet someone, fall in love with someone, get engaged, then get married, and then have your family and work together, that is the ideal, but it seems only an ideal around here."

Women seeking new relationships also commented on what they perceived to be the absence of available and appropriate men in Mildura. One respondent commented:

"I even think it would be lovely to meet someone nice. I would still like to share my life with someone, but where are they?"

Another middle-aged woman meanwhile expressed the views of many after she had received what she described as an "atrocious" approach from a local man when asking her out:

"Do we have to go to another country to be treated like nice human beings? I think the women are sick of it. We're sick of it. We're sick of it. I want to be treated with respect thank you very much."

In addition, many women commented on the changing aspects of 'international romance'. In the 1960s women remarked on the necessity to make a commitment after knowing the prospective spouse for only a few weeks, and then making essentially a final emigration, out to Australia. Several respondents now had sons or daughters who were conducting international liaisons, through advanced communications and relatively low cost air fares, and had the option available to them to return to Australia if the relationships did not succeed.

As mentioned previously, courting for men involved in the agriculture industry was also allegedly proving more difficult, as women were reportedly less prepared to accept rural conditions and the lifestyle. Whereas in the past respondents suggested that it was inevitable that teachers sent to rural areas would marry local farmers, some respondents suggested that contemporary teachers and other women would be more selective about which farmers were considered to be a 'good prospect'. One male respondent commented:

"Women want a style of life that supports their dreams, ambitions, etcetera, [and] for their children and so on. So there might be some hesitance to marry a grower still growing dried fruit with one ton to the acre on very poor subsistence type block, but particularly now when there's a good living to be made from fruit blocks with the wine, not that I'm suggesting they're gold diggers, but if they marry someone with a corporate type attitude, they're going to get a return on their investment."

17.3 Expectations of Marriage

Respondents also remarked on very different approaches to marriage, and the changing expectations of marriage. Whereas older respondents viewed marriage as a commitment which would involve hard work, the younger generation allegedly had far more romantic impressions of marriage. The contemporary ostentatious weddings were contrasted with the comparatively spartan celebrations of the past, and women compared starting their married life with no possessions or furniture with contemporary expectations to begin married life with a fully equipped and furnished house. One woman commented:

"I think it's a lot to do with pressure. When we got married, and my kids would say 'oh yes nan's back in dark ages', you didn't have to have a fridge, you didn't have to have a washing machine. All you had was an ice chest, and you washed by hand. Nowadays the young people expect it, they've just got to go in there with all these bits and pieces, and it's alright when two of them are working in the family, but once they get down and they start a family and you've only got one wage coming in, there are great difficulties there, because they aren't being able manage on their one wage because they've over committed themselves. There's a pressure to have all these things. They don't know how to wash without a washing machine or anything."

Financial burdens brought about by this consumerism often allegedly financed on credit, was criticised by many respondents for adding unnecessary pressure on new marriages. According to respondents, the romance now associated with marriage also led many respondents to have unrealistic expectations of married life, notably expectations that husbands would transform into an idealised 'television husband' (wives were reportedly often brought back down to earth by being reminded "you knew what I was like when you married me"). Many older respondents who had had successful marriages emphasised the importance of the shared struggle in marriage, through financial and emotional issues, and suggested that media pressure, notably television advertisements and magazines, led young men and women to believe that life was not going to be a struggle. One respondent commented:

"The expectations are too high that's for sure. You hear of them, they get married today and six weeks later they're apart because they don't give of themselves. They are not prepared to give of themselves, and give and take. There's always got to be that one that if you have a blue that's got to say well perhaps you're sorry and you can work it out another way. No marriage goes along without a blue. You'd be fibbing if you said you were."

Respondents reported that romantic expectations and the persuasive media presentation of idealised wives and mothers in marriage presented women and men with a false representation of married life, and the publication of an article in the Melbourne Age on the 'Myth of Motherhood'²⁰ prompted several respondents to comment that they had felt that they had to be 'perfect', and had felt guilty about not meeting their own unrealistic expectations. In particular, women stressed that the emphasis on women being able to cope without the support of extended family or friends, as mothers as part of a nuclear family were unrealistic. Respondents who had access to extended family support and those who did not, all emphasised the difficulties facing women who attempted to raise children without family support: a situation that often became critical if the father was absent. The support of family or friends for mothers with young children was viewed as crucial, and women without extended family were reported to be particularly disadvantaged.

17.4 Changes after marriage

The transition from courting to married life was also viewed as something many women were unprepared for. Several respondents noted that 'everything changed after we were married', and that many husbands expected them to 'replace' their own mothers. Many women believed that their husbands had been cherished by their mothers and raised to expect women to cater for their every need, and despite the attention lavished on them during courting, women were expected to follow the role model provided by their mother in laws: several respondents commented that prior to marriage, their husbands had repeatedly said that they were going to cherish and look after them, but in reality, as new wives they were expected to 'look after' the husbands.

Whilst some respondents reflected on their experience of very positive communication within their marriages, several respondents described their husbands as the only decision maker in the household. Some respondents reported that they felt their situations were commonplace, and decisions made about where their

²⁰ **Motherload.** Edited extract from **The Mask of Motherhood - how mothering changes everything and why we pretend it doesn't** by Susan Maushart, published by Random House in **Good Weekend. The Melbourne Age.** August 2nd 1997.

family was to live, house purchases and even selection of motor vehicles were made unilaterally by their husbands, and accepted as being in the best interests of the family whatever the practical implications of the situation for the woman of the household.

Many women asserted that despite supposed change within the family, many men viewed their 'home as their castle' and that their word should be law, and not a matter for negotiation. At a workshop at the New South Wales rural women's gathering about 'family meal times', the women discussed their husbands insistence on eating their evening meal in front of a television with a beer instead of sitting around the family dinner table. One woman suggested that the televisions should be thrown out, but the women present agreed with another woman who said 'if you threw out the television the husband would go too'. The workshop leader then continued to recommend presenting tasty and varied meals for the children, and with regard to the husband suggested that the women could attempt to persuade the husband to sit at the table for one meal a week. Such lack of respect for women's work in preparing the food, and the acceptability for men not to communicate over food was reported by respondents to be commonplace.

Inequities in marriage had a very deleterious effect on women's confidence and self esteem. Some women commented on their loss of identity and self esteem through marriages where their husbands felt the need to not recognise and constantly criticise their contribution to the household. One woman commented on her loss of identity:

"Self doubt...it was to do with getting married young too, you're not your own person to a certain degree, and you just lose a bit of confidence...you do, I think, tend to lose yourself when you get married a little bit, you lose your own identity, especially when you have children, because they are your life."

Some women were concerned that changes in society often left men feeling less important and therefore they exhibited what women felt was a male need to be 'powerful' through relating inappropriately to their wives and children. It was asserted that some men did not respect their wives as individuals, and used the language of possession and control in discussions over family issues.

Respondents asserted that men's activities and women's activities were also accorded different status and importance: in general, respondents asserted that women were expected to remain at home to look after the family while men pursued their leisure activities, but men were not expected to reciprocate and support women in their activities. As mentioned in relation to sporting activities, women were often deterred from going out, because it created more work than the women perceived the activity was worth. Respondents reported that it was not uncommon for women to be expected to be at home at lunch time, whatever their own schedule, to serve lunch to their husbands.

In addition, male spending on prestige items such as cars, updated, but often unnecessary prestige machinery, or male recreational activity was viewed as necessary, whereas respondents asserted that in many situations, female spending on items for the children, and food shopping was scrutinised, and clothing and personal care and women's leisure activities, for example going to the cinema with a friend or going to an exercise class, was regarded as frivolous and a waste of their husband's money. Respondents also reported that in general, heavy speeding fines inflicted on men breaking the law by speeding through residential areas, were also treated with bravado rather than seen as depriving the family of essential income.

Many respondents felt that during the 1980s and 1990s men had lost their way in the rural community, and as women were seeking more fulfilment within the family and work, men had felt threatened by their progress, as they felt diminished in power and status. Respondents stressed that men had far more to gain than to lose through supporting changes in their wives working and social lives, but several respondents stressed that men were afraid that if women became "too smart" they would not be able to 'control' them. Women, however, stressed that they felt it was in women's nature to return whatever they learned to their families, and that husbands would benefit from their wives' self fulfilment. One respondent commented, "My husband was the type that didn't want women to work. It terrified him to think I could be independent." and reflected that it was a disappointment that more men did not appear to have the confidence to support women.

17.5 Issues facing men in rural communities

Respondents were sympathetic to the challenges facing men, and several women felt that it would be good if men could 'talk' more to each other and to spend social time together engaging in activities which were not

alcohol related. One respondent hoped that men could socialise more together, and one respondent thought that Landcare groups were a positive 'non-traditional' development in the rural communities.

"Men seem to have to have that alcohol there as an excuse to get together. If two men went to the movies together, everyone would say 'ah they're gay'. They don't have that friendship group that women seem to have. And I think they need it, I think it's time they got their act together, and organised something like that. Maybe these landcare groups might be the start of something sensible."

Many respondents asserted that parenting, and peer pressure at school, discouraged boys from discussing emotional issues, and they were concerned that this led to problems with boys and men acknowledging that they had problems or could deal with 'sensitive' issues. Almost all respondents expressed their concern about youth male suicide, and praised the government initiative in investigating this issue.

Respondents were also concerned about the youth male fighting and 'gang cultures' in Mildura, which many felt was the result of unemployment, absent fathers, alcohol and boredom. In addition as suggested in some recent research²¹ confusion over sexuality was asserted by some respondents to be a cause of problems for teenage boys, which could lead to suicide.

Men, women and relationships was a common feature of discussion in interviews, but respondents found it difficult to present solutions to the problems facing women and men. Several respondents emphasised the need for men to 'take responsibility' as husbands and fathers and to take more responsibilities for their own actions. One respondent commented:

"I hate to say it but the blokes are pretty ordinary when it comes to standing up for what their families need."

Others were concerned that social and economic change had "emasculated" men leading them to relate in inappropriate ways, and hoped that women could show men a more positive way ahead. One respondent optimistically commented:

"It's women and men you know. I think if women have it together, men will follow. Women are always the leaders, they are the strength."

17.6 Changing Perspectives on Parenting

Although the overwhelming majority of respondents stressed the importance of parenting to both children in families and wider society, many respondents felt that the work of women who worked as full time mothers was not valued. As with the work of carers, many respondents questioned why working as a child minder or nursery nurse was work, working in the home as a mother was not regarded as work. One respondent commented:

"For all this great commotion about you know, Australian values, that they are based on the family and all this. I mean no one values raising a family. It looks as if 'she hasn't been in the work force'."

The advantages of raising children in a country community were emphasised by many respondents, for example a mother commented that she had advised her daughter to raise any children in a rural context:

"I always told her that when or if she ever decides to raise a family to think about doing it in a country area for formative years - they can do what they like later. I think it's important for kids to have an idea of balance, to be brought up without the rush and the concrete."

Several parents commented that the advantages of raising children in Mildura was that children could have a longer childhood, and were less street-wise and "smart-alecy" than their Melbourne or metropolitan counterparts. Children on blocks or farms were also perceived to be more independent and show more initiative than urban children.

²¹ Edward Green, *Rural Youth Suicide: the issue of male homosexuality in Social Change in Rural Australia*, Rockhampton: Rural Social and Economic Research Centre, Central Queensland University, 1996.

'Parenting' was raised by respondents as an important issue in the community because many respondents felt that there were increasing problems with lack of adequate parenting. In families where both parents were working, it was asserted that parents were working, resting and preparing for work, without allowing adequate time for the children: several respondents asserted that 'time' was replaced with the provision of material goods for children.

All respondents were asked to comment on the changing responsibilities of men in parenting. The key issue raised by respondents was the assumption that child-rearing was predominantly the mother's responsibility, and the disappointment that men did not become more actively involved with their children's lives and development.

Many women enjoyed being at home with their children, but other women who wished to remain in the work force or to employ other women to care for their children were often implicitly or directly criticised by women and men. The availability of child care was good, but despite the availability many respondents, notably those on lower incomes stressed that the costs of childcare did put pressure on the family budget.

In general, respondents suggested that what respondents viewed as most men's peripheral role in child rearing, was something to be viewed as regrettable. When one respondent was asked if her husband helped with the children she commented: "He didn't, no. He went to work and came home, went to work and came home". Her views concurred with the opinions of many other respondents who felt that men who were not involved with their children were missing out:

"I think it's good for the men to be involved, because, they miss out, really. Sometimes they don't even know their children, and there's lots of special things you know. I know chemically, they are different, um but my son in law, he really enjoys his daughter - he's had so much to do with her. I think it's wonderful...Enriching their lives as well...instead of you know, Daddy is the one with the deep voice that just appears at night, you know, comes home and is gone in the morning you know, and just sits there reading newspapers and watching telly. Yeah, cos that's what the role of men was wasn't it? They just were the ones that went to work. And the ones that children had a fear of, you know, do this or I'll tell your father when he gets home. That's dreadful isn't it?"

Several respondents noted what they suggested was their 'politically incorrect' concern about absent fathers, and the concomitant ability of mother parenting alone to control their teenage sons. Several women who had had problems as single mothers with their sons reiterated these concerns, and stressed the need for male mentoring and role models. Respondents were, however, also concerned that single mothers were "demonised" and blamed for their sons' behavioural problems. Although many respondents had reservations about single mothers raising children, and viewed it as increasing welfare dependency, many in the older generation suggested that it was preferable to 'shot-gun weddings' or young girls being sent away to have children who were then adopted. Several respondents who had young sons stressed the responsibilities of mothers *and* fathers to ensure that boys grew up to respect women, for the benefit of the next generation, and one woman commented:

"What do we tell the new generations of males? What are their mothers telling them you know? My message to mothers is please bring up your sons a bit decent, to respect all people, men and women, as people, respect them all as human beings."

Attitudes to discipline and communication varied considerably between the older and younger generations of respondents. Older respondents were concerned that the younger generation was indulged and children were not given adequate boundaries or discipline. The fast food culture, and high expectations of children regarding material goods was viewed as potentially damaging for the future of the community. Conversely, younger respondents were positive about improved communication between parents and children, and many commented that they had a 'comfort zone' with their children that was not present with their own parents.

17.7 Divorce

For the older generation of respondents, divorce was reported to simply not be an option, either economically or socially, and several of the older generation of respondents stressed the importance of the Whitlam Administration reforms because they enabled women to leave violent or unhappy relationships. A relatively new permissiveness towards divorce focused on the rights of women to leave relationships which were destroying them as human beings, without being forced to be oppressed by poverty.

Divorce, however remained a painful and contentious issue in Mildura. Many women felt that women trapped in abusive relationships did not have the means or strength to leave these relationships, and compared the problems faced by these women, with what some asserted was a lack of commitment to either marriage or children by other women who were perceived to 'work' the welfare system putting their own needs above those of their children.

The high expectations of fairy tale marriages, coupled with, according to respondents, high levels of domestic violence, and conflicts over custody meant that divorce was often difficult and expensive. It was asserted by respondents that many women were forced to go through considerable trauma in the divorce process, often allegedly caused by the petty and vengeful actions of their husbands, notably in relation to the custody of any children. One respondent commented that women were often intimidated by their husband's aggressive posturing:

"A lot of the husbands and fathers, they hold it over the mother. You know, they'll say you know, if you leave me you'll never see the kids again. You know I've got the money, I've got the power, I can have the best barristers, you've got nothing. And the women do believe it."

Another respondent, however, was confident that the new laws protected women's rights to their children, commenting:

"The court has to decide what's in the best interests of the child. Unless your husband can prove in a court of law that you're a heroin-taking prostitute, the kids are yours."

Two women who contributed to the research outwith Mildura, however, had lost custody of their children to their husbands after their husband's false allegations that they were drug users had been believed by the allegedly conservative rural court. Despite the legal safeguards put in place by the state and federal governments to protect the interests of women and children in divorce, local loyalties were perceived by some respondents to have an inevitable impact on the outcome of court hearings.

In the event of divorce involving an agricultural or horticultural property, respondents asserted that the women attempting to leave the farmer was pressured by other family members into not claiming against the family property. Women who then did not claim a property settlement often found themselves without adequate income to support their children, as farmers and blockies commonly returned low income returns which eliminated their liability for child support payments. One respondent commented:

"I think the biggest problem for women in country areas is that they grew up to believe that they didn't own anything. So therefore when you say to a rural woman, 'you know, excuse me, you can have half this farm', it's 'oh no no no, his father and his grandfather, because it's passed down you know, 'oh no I couldn't. It doesn't matter if I've worked on that farm you know seven days a week for the last 20 odd years...You've got to understand, it was his father's. The mindset in the women is that 'I don't own anything, and I'm not worth anything'."

18 FAMILY VIOLENCE ISSUES

"All people have the right to live in a safe society, free from violence and fear, both in public and in their own homes. Violence against women is a significant policy issue, recognised both nationally and internationally as one that fundamentally affects the ability of women to achieve equal status." ²²

Judy Moylan

On the Second International Rural Women's Day, October 15th 1997, Judi Moylan, the then Minister for the Status of Women and John Anderson, the then Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, launched the the National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit which is the result of the work of the National Domestic Violence Forum. The discreet information pack is available (at the time of writing) from Gordon Kelly at the Department of Administrative Services Distribution Unit, in Canberra Tel. 02 6202 5536, and Loddon Mallee

²² Moylan, J. Launch of the National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit by Hon. Judi Moylan MP, Minister for the Status of Women. Wednesday 15 October 1997, p.3. Unpublished text of Ministerial speech, 1997.

Women's Health domestic violence worker, Tel. 03 5443 0233, and provides an accessible and extremely informative summary of the issues facing rural women in situations of family or domestic violence.

In his address at the launch John Anderson reflected on the difficulty facing women who wish to access domestic violence services, leave a violent partner or be anonymous in accessing domestic violence services, in a rural situation. The Minister's commitment to tackling domestic violence issues in rural areas, and what has been referred to as the effective 'ring-fencing' of money for rural domestic programmes in recent rounds of public spending cuts, reflects not only the political sensitivity of funding for domestic violence, but also the extent of the problem.

At the same launch, Judy Moylan commented that "The stoicism which has been such an anchor for rural women in building our nation will not service women and children experiencing violence at home", and increasing numbers of rural women and men have worked together to raise awareness of the issue. In rural Victoria, domestic violence services have only been in place for the past decade. Significantly in this research, when respondents were asked about policies or services for women, the overwhelming majority of respondents referred to the critical importance of domestic violence initiatives in rural areas, and the presence of supported accommodation and the sexual assault unit in Mildura.

In addition, in spite of the sensitivity of the topic, many respondents stressed the importance of highlighting the issue in any research outcomes, and were candid in confirming that domestic violence had been a problem within their friendship or family networks. Numerous respondents ensured that I was aware of the domestic violence programmes in the locality, praised the work being done by staff they did not know, and emphasised the importance of 'researching' the issue: the emphasis placed on this one aspect of the research by respondents was unusual.

In addition, although domestic violence is notoriously difficult to 'count', the report on the Health Status of Victorian Women comments that:

"It is also likely that women substantially under-report assault, particularly domestic violence, attributing it instead to accidental injury. Their number can not be obtained with any degree of confidence from routine hospital morbidity data (VIMD), but there is unlikely to be less under reporting to special injury data collections such as VISS. A recent analysis of VISS data has revealed that, of a total of 18,439 records of women presenting with injuries to the emergency departments contributing to VISS, 239 (1.3 per cent) were definite cases of domestic violence, 309 (1.7 per cent) were probably and 261 (1.4 per cent) were suggestive. The peak incidence was in women between the ages of 20 and 29 years."
(Health Status of Victorian Women, 1997, p. 42)

State-wide rural domestic violence services have only been in place since the early 1990s, and reliable statistical data comparing the incidence of domestic violence in Mildura with other parts of the state is difficult to establish, but statistics do suggest that Mildura does face considerable problems with domestic violence.

18.1 Family Violence in Mildura

In Mildura, one respondent commented that "at one time people would make all sorts of excuses rather than admit it", but in the mid 1980s women in Mildura obtained funding from government to form WISAR, the Women's Information, Support and Resources community contact point, which was established to provide information and support to Women and Children escaping domestic violence, and establish Nydia House, a Women's Refuge run by the Sunraysia Women's Collective. The women involved in the establishment of the refuge were alleged to have had a radical reputation, and what was reported to be a confrontational style, but respondents also noted that the presence of the refuge and WISAR in itself confronted people in Mildura to face the fact that domestic violence existed in their community. One respondent commented that in the early days the refuge workers had to face considerable hostility and accusations that they were 'inventing' the problems of domestic violence and child abuse, and other respondents alleged that town professionals, were initially also 'in denial' about the problem.

Since the early days of the refuge, changes in personnel, location and the management style of the domestic violence service, and a softer approach to promotion of the issues in the community has to some extent brought the community to have a very positive attitude towards the service, and a sense of 'ownership' of the problem. The service now provides high, medium, and low security accommodation and an outreach service, and one respondent commented that as the result of the outreach and good 'public relations' work of the staff

at the service, it was "now very well accepted within the community that regrettably domestic violence is part of our community. It is happening to people, and they need the service."

One respondent commented that her work that had brought her into contact with the service, and that experience had made her aware of a side to life in the town she had previously been unaware of. She commented that she had been 'woken up' to some unpleasant aspects of life in her home town:

"I guess it [Nydia House] woke me up. I got educated. I had heard some things, but now I know things go on. My feelings about the place [Mildura] have changed since then. I feel more a part of it, and more aware of that what ever part you live in, wherever you are, certain things are happening underneath: I didn't know that before."

Other respondents stressed the importance of raising awareness of the issues in the town, to enable people to seek help and to assist older women to deal with unresolved issues about violence in the past.

"It's definitely helped awareness...Women stayed in those situations before because there wasn't any way out for them. They didn't know there was help available. With a bit of publicity, they've been able to make a break and get out of those situations."

"Although there was a need [in the past], people weren't aware that those sort of things were happening to us. Now they can come up with some figures. A lot of those things were hidden you know, especially sexual abuse and whatever. A lot of older women are saying 'that happened to me', and there was no recognition of it before then. There was no help. I don't know which comes first - recognition or people talking about it. A lot of people are relieved to be able to come out and say that happened to me. And now to ask for help to get out of situation before something drastic happens."

Despite the success of the service in assisting women several respondents felt that the work being done by the Mallee Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Unit was helping only a fraction of women in trouble in the region. Several respondents asserted that often alcohol abuse and prescription drug addiction or anti-depressants were masking a wider problem relating to violence against women in the home. In addition, in common with other work completed in other parts of rural Australia this research suggests that women on farms were particularly vulnerable to domestic violence, as one respondent commented, "it's out of sight, and out of mind".

18.2 Leaving Situations of Family Violence

In relation to domestic violence, many people who have no experience or knowledge frequently ask why the women don't "just leave." Several respondents stressed that women with children in situations of domestic violence wanted to keep their families together and just wanted their violent partner's behaviour to change. One respondent summarised a common situation by saying:

"The biggest thing is, most of them, they love their partner, they just want their behaviour to stop. And in the ideal world if that stopped, everything would be okay. So that's why they all keep hoping it's going to change....they go through the cycle of violence where it's an explosion, the honeymoon after, and then it starts building again. And they just hope that that it's not going to happen again. Obviously, most get pushed to the point where until the violence is actually life threatening, they don't take that step to get out."

The cyclical pattern of leaving and returning to violent partners is a common feature in domestic violence cases, but this pattern was misunderstood within the community leaving several respondents to comment that people then thought that the situation 'couldn't be that bad' at home if the woman was returning. Respondents suggested that when domestic violence was 'occasional' the women felt that the partner would change and when the violence was constant often women's self confidence was so eroded they could not leave.

Respondents also stressed that women leaving domestic violence situations in rural areas often had nowhere to go and no economic resources. One woman asked "If you want these people [women] to make changes, what are we asking them to give up, and what are we asking them to put in it's place", and other respondents emphasised that it was unfair that the victims of crime had to leave their homes and communities. Several women emphasised that the psychological damage done by domestic violence was extreme, and that the

sense of fear provoked by relatively occasional physical attack left women living in a constant state of anxiety. One respondent commented:

"Domestic Violence is something that gets into your psyche, and you don't get rid of it for a long time. The person gets totally into their psyche, into their every thought. It's such a psychological game these bastards play. It gets to be a way of life for them. They forget the real world. There is no safe place for these women, because they can hear him in their heads, and they know he's out there, and they know he's looking. I've even had it said to me that it's now their normal way of life. They don't feel they've got a way out, this is going to be the way their life is going to be. That's really sad."

18.3 Changing Attitudes to Domestic Violence

Changing attitudes to domestic violence were viewed as a priority by service providers and other respondents, and educating communities about issues relating to domestic violence. Although women in Australia have good recourse to legal protection, several respondents commented that the police and lawyers needed to 'upskill' in relation to these areas and also understand the process of domestic violence: it was asserted that police and lawyers found it difficult to understand why women returned to abusive situations, and also in some cases allegedly disapproved of 'breaking up the family' on the grounds of domestic violence.

In addition, when discussing domestic violence several respondents questioned what they could do, as with a knowledge that women frequently returned to violent partners and attempted to resume a normal life, they felt that their direct intervention would place them in a difficult situation when the family in question began behaving as if nothing had happened. In addition, several respondents suggested that the gossip in town prevented many women discussing their problems and therefore the situation reached crisis point. One respondent commented that "If people are being faced with violence and issues like that, they don't talk because people have a mistrust of the town around them, and they won't want to get help from people around them because of malicious tongues".

Several respondents suggested that it would not be possible to change existing attitudes within the community: some suggested that men in their 20s and 30s were choosing not to change their attitudes, and that attention should be focused on preventative education work with boys currently in the education system. Peer pressure was viewed as another means of changing male attitudes, but publicly voicing opinions against the norm was viewed as a personal risk for men. As one respondent commented the easiest option for people not involved in the situation was to blame the victim:

"If you blame the victim, you blame the most vulnerable, and you can clean the mess up real quick. Because you bury it."

Researchers in this area often take care to distinguish between talk about violence and the consequent generation of fear amongst women, and the actual events. This research would indicate that the problem of violence within the home is a critical issue in rural Australia. The current government initiatives are vital, and it is essential that this funding continues. Working with perpetrators is not a remit of the domestic violence workers, and in addition to funding for victims of crime it would be of benefit for the government to support work with men and boys to attempt to reduce violence in rural communities.

19 RURAL WOMEN AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Rural women's limited access to justice has been the subject of state and federal government attention, and initiatives such as the Murray Mallee Women's Legal Service was part of the Government's response to the widely recognised problem.

Respondents suggested, however, that enabling women to use the law to their own advantage still seemed to be a problem for women in rural communities, and service providers and respondents emphasised the problems that women faced in using the law. Despite Australia having some of the strongest legal safeguards for women in the world, relating to property settlement, family violence and gun seizure, it was asserted that women often did not pursue their rights in law. One respondent commented that women had to change, rather than the laws in Australia in order to achieve equity in access to justice:

"It's my opinion that they [the laws] really don't make any difference. Because even if the legislation or the rules and that are changed, it's the women themselves. And they already

know what they're entitled to, and what they can do, but it's another matter of getting them to do it."

One respondent commented that whereas women in Melbourne were not afraid to engage a lawyer and pursue their rights, country values inculcated a lack of confidence in women seeking justice:

"Women in the city have no hesitation in going to a private solicitor, applying for legal aid if necessary, or, a lot of the women like that have had their jobs, and have their own self worth, they're not sort of relying on their husbands. And even if they are, it's not the way that a rural woman would do it."

The nature of the legal system in a small town also meant that several respondents asserted that women were disadvantaged in Mildura due to gossip and misinformation influencing lawyers attitudes to women clients. In addition, several respondents asserted that rural lawyers in general, tended to have very traditional attitudes towards women's place in society and therefore favoured a conciliatory approach rather than ensuring women obtained their legal entitlements. Due to the small pool of lawyers many respondents felt that unacceptable conflicts of interest were commonplace, not only in Mildura, but also in wider country Victoria.

Changing attitudes to women's legal rights was seen as a major challenge in rural communities and one respondent commented that the information had to be in women's heads rather than written down, and a process of giving women the confidence to use the law was a process that had to begin in the education system. Another respondent added:

"These sort of changes take a long time. First of all the you've got to get the women to have confidence in you right, because no matter what you say that bastard will be in the background telling her different. Right, so you've got to get them to trust you, then you've got to try and get them to educate their daughters. That's it. It's changing them, and then having them to pass it down the generations."

20 RURAL WOMEN'S HEALTH

20.1 Perceptions of Women's Health in Mildura

Women's health and the health of the men and children women cared for was a key concern for respondents in this research, and rural health issues have been highlighted recently by VicHealth²³. As with women carers, on the more routine day to day health concerns, respondents emphasised that women were the primary care givers, and the effective medical 'front line'. As primary carers in the family women expressed particular concern about levels of childhood asthma in the region and aged care provision, notably for residential and dementia and Alzheimer's patients. Women particularly at risk from poor health were repeatedly reported to be Koori women, aged women and NESB women, particularly women in the Turkish community who were reported to face cultural constraints on contact with health professionals outside the home.

Many respondents praised the work of the local health professionals, and in particular the client based, progressive, and targeted initiatives managed by the community health centre. There was, however, concern expressed about funding cuts to health programmes and fears about future rationalisation of resources which would mean that people who were in most need of health services on low incomes would simply not be able to afford to purchase health care. Respondents stressed that the focus on women's health programmes should continue into the future, and while there was support for male health initiatives, respondents asserted that men's health programmes should not be funded at the expense of women's initiatives.

Women emphasised the transition women's bodies went through in life, and many emphasised that women themselves had to cope with major changes in their own bodies as well as caring for other members of the family. A meeting convened by the Jean Hailes Foundation and the Sunraysia Community Health Centre in June 1997 about women's health drew an audience of 500 women, clearly demonstrating the demand for information about health issues. The emphasis on HRT at the meeting was criticised by some respondents

²³ VicHealth Letter Issue No. 9 Autumn 1998 produced by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation. Carlton South.

who had been present and several felt that what they asserted was a one-sided presentation in favour of HRT, was indicative of the limited information that rural women received about these issues.

Discussions around the need for more high quality and balanced information was stressed by respondents and several respondents highlighted what they felt was the need for more 'positive', or 'good news' information about women's health, and the limited number of respondents who were aware of the Loddon Mallee Women's Health work supported their approach.²⁴ The work of screening programmes, notably the Breastscreen van was seen as vital in rural communities, and the integrated approach to screening and follow up work in Melbourne was praised by respondents who had had personal or family involvement with breast cancer. One woman commented about her experience:

"[when the screening picks something up] you're on your own, and wondering what in the name of fortune is happening to me this time? It is a bit scary, but they fund you to go to Melbourne. I mean it's only a day away from home, but if it had been really anything pretty nasty you'd have had to sort of ring up and say 'well excuse me, I'm not coming home tonight, I have to have something else done'. It's been a big improvement and those sort of facilities need to be there."

Women also stressed a complementary need for promotion of positive aspects of women's well-being, for example, building confidence and self-esteem as well as cancer screening. They also stressed the importance of health campaigns they could relate to, and several women praised the contribution of Sara Henderson to the breast screening campaign.

Many respondents stressed the need for women to be given confidence in controlling their health, and to be more assertive in seeking information about health both as individuals and from health practitioners, on issues ranging from teenage reproductive health to aged care. Critically, many respondents stressed the need for more women practitioners in rural areas, notably in areas such as Mildura with multicultural populations where women were faced with cultural constraints regarding contact with men. Several respondents suggested that more women doctors who would be able to empathise with women's health concerns should be encouraged to practice in rural communities.

Many women also commented on what was referred to as "the burnt chop syndrome" whereby women always put themselves last in order of importance in the family, for example eating the burnt chop or the smallest remaining portion. Respondents also raised issues linked to the expectations of women to take the role of the 'mother' in the family, in that there was commonly no space in family routines to allow the mother to be ill. Several respondents commented that when they had been ill their illness was rendered invisible by their husbands and children and they were expected to carry on performing all their household tasks.

20.2 Reproductive Health

The availability of contraception to married and unmarried women was seen as one of the most important developments in women's health in the Sunraysia region in recent decades. Health promotion around reproductive issues was seen by respondents as an extremely important area, particularly for teenagers. Many respondents stressed the need for teenagers to be educated about reproductive health and about responsibilities within relationships. In particular respondents asserted that teenagers should be educated that they could positively choose not to have sexual relationships with their boyfriends or girlfriends.

Even though many felt Mildura was far from the troubles of the real world, many respondents were concerned about sexually transmitted disease, and the risk of HIV/AIDS infection which knows no geographical boundaries. The cost of condoms was highlighted by some respondents as a health issue due to sexually active teenagers not having money to pay to have safe sex, and respondents emphasised the need for all members of the community to be aware of seemingly 'distant' health problems.

20.3 Postnatal care

Post natal care was raised by many respondents as an area of increasing concern. It was notable that even men who informally contributed to the research, expressed their concern about the perceived early discharge of mothers from hospital care. Respondents also expressed their perception that women were not given adequate choice in birth plans, and many women expressed their concern about what they perceived to be was the increase in caesarean sections at the Mildura Base Hospital.

²⁴ Loddon Mallee Women's Health News Journal, Loddon Mallee Women's Health, 48 Queen Street, Bendigo, 3550. Freecall 1800 350 233. Tel No. 03 5443 0233.

Respondents also expressed considerable concern about support for women who were categorised as suffering from postnatal depression. Many women emphasised that rather than designating the mother as depressed, more should be done to support her and her baby: several women asserted that 'post natal depression' rather than being a physiological condition was the result of a combination of lack of extended family support, sleep deprivation, unsupportive or absent fathers, and the demands of other children. Nursing Mothers was highly praised by many of the respondents as a 'life saving' organisation, and many respondents recommended that more funding should be allocated to domiciliary midwives, or even longer term professional support for women with babies.

Many respondents reported an unsympathetic response from doctors towards new mothers both within and outwith Mildura who seemed to be unwilling to see beyond what they simply perceived to be a mother not coping. One respondent whose child had a physical problem which was not identified for some time, recalled that repeated visits to the doctor about the child, resulted in the doctor telling her that her stress was unsettling the child. She commented:

"To get that sort of reaction from someone who was supposed to be really well thought of and everything. I was sitting there in tears, I could hardly speak because I was so upset. He was sort of saying 'you're stressed out, go home, unstress yourself, you'll be right'. Quite a few other people said that too, it's a very common thing, you know your baby cries, 'oh you're stressed, go and relax for a while, the baby will stop crying'. But if there's something physically wrong with baby it won't stop will it."

Many women commented that women were now expected to cope with extreme circumstances on their own, and respondents asserted that it was very difficult for women without family support or friendship networks (as was often the case in Mildura), to cope with the constant demands of small children. Significantly, elsewhere in Victoria the Ovens and King Community Health Centre has developed a Post Natal Depression Volunteer Visiting Pilot project, to combat issues surrounding post natal depression,

20.4 Health Status, Stress, Depression and Mental Health

Stress and periods of depression were raised by respondents as problems for women, and women as well as men were affected by drug and alcohol addiction, prescription drug abuse and gambling. Alcohol addiction was perceived by some to be linked to domestic violence in the home, and social stigma attached to these issues was perceived to prevent women from accessing help.

Counselling for women on mental health or addiction issues was perceived to be a problem in Mildura due to confidentiality issues. With the notable exception of work done with survivors of sexual assault, several respondents felt that women-friendly affordable counselling was simply not available in the town. Respondents also expressed their concern about what they perceived to be the increasing numbers of younger women who needed help for issues ranging from eating disorders to serious depressions in the town.

Respondents often commented on the interconnectedness of women's health issues, and were concerned that professionals failed to make connections that appeared to be obvious to women. Women felt that power issues were sometimes at play here, and were concerned over the long term impact of this. For example several respondents expressed their concern over the impact of pesticides on women's health, but felt that this concerns would never be addressed.

"Health status is a political construction. You know That comes into environmental issues as well you know. How can mother maintain her health when she's out there pruning vines and being sprayed all over with God knows what, but they don't want to look at that because that would impact on the agriculture. And the admission, that people would have to admit that things were being done incorrectly."

SECTION IV

21 THE RURAL WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: POLICY AND PRAGMATIC CHANGE

In material promoting The New National Agenda for Women 1993 to 2000 the Office of the Status of Women states:

"Women play a vital role in shaping the future of Australia. Although every woman's life is different, we have shared experiences and many goals in common: pursuing the life we want, having a real say in our lives, good health, safety and security, and access to services for ourselves and our children. We want recognition for the valuable economic and social contribution we make to society as carers, homemakers and workers in paid employment.

Many aspects of our lives have changed for the better but we want progress to continue. We want opportunities to participate and contribute in both community and family life."

Australia has world leading policies for women, and in particular policy developed by rural women for rural women through the activism of the past decade and the support of state and federal government has led to extremely high quality rural women's policies. A broad commitment to women across Government has been strengthened by the development of the rural women's movement which has campaigned for greater recognition of women in rural communities and in government. The significance of rural women's issues was recognised at a Federal level in 1995 with the establishment of the Rural Women's Unit in 1995.

In Victoria the Victorian Women's Council advises government on women's issues, and includes representatives from rural communities. The Victorian Government has also actively consulted with rural women, for example the report 'Getting to the Heart of Victoria - working with women in rural and remote communities in 1995 and the Victorian government commitment to the Women in Agriculture and Resource Management (WARM) Forum in 1997. It could be asserted, however, that the most significant achievement in Victoria with regard to rural women has been the establishment of the Rural Women's Network and the Network magazine, which in the year of research was celebrating 10 years of publication.

21.1 The Rural Women's Movement in Victoria

In Victoria in 1986 the then Labour Administration appointed the first women's advisers in the Department of Agriculture. The resulting work of the Rural Women's Network, and in particular the work of Jenni Mitchell and later Anna Lottkovitz, mobilised rural women's activists throughout the state and sowed the seeds of a rural women's movement which has since spread across Australia. The Rural Women's Network in Victoria produces a quarterly newsletter Network on behalf of all women in rural Victoria which has two major objectives: to link women's groups and interested individuals into a network towards sharing resources and skills to meet the needs of rural women, and to enable women in rural Victoria through their own contact and support network, to have a more active and influential role in government decisions which affect their lives and those of their families and communities. Network is available free from the Rural Women's Network, 7/240 - 250 Victoria Pde (PO Box 500) East Melbourne 3002.

In addition, Women on Farms Gatherings have been held annually in Victoria since 1990, and the ABC Radio Rural Woman of the Year Award has done much to raise the profile of women's contribution to rural communities.

21.2 Local Awareness of Policy Change

Despite the remarkable success of the Rural Women's Movement, and gender equity programmes in government, the awareness of women's policy, and in particular rural women's policy was limited in the research sample in Mildura.

The minority of women who were aware of policy development, Network Magazine and the 'Women on Farms Gathering' were extremely positive about the changes in attitudes to rural women, and one respondent commented that: "women have been on farms forever. They did everything that had to be done, and the rural women's movement is a chance to be seen and heard, and all the generations behind them too". These respondents suggested that the rural women's movement was seen to be more relevant to the dryland areas than the irrigation areas, and some respondents suggested that this was due to the cultural and social differences between the ethnic communities, and because awareness-raising in the irrigation district had been limited. Some respondents suggested that it would be difficult to create a united women's group across the different cultures in the irrigation district.

The rural women's network was also seen as a very positive benefit to women because it supported women in expressing views on women's place and participation in primary industries and in the local community, and confirmed that other women were publicly expressing similar views. The network also was reported to have raised awareness of the strengths of other rural women, and encouraged women to reach for goals and aspirations that were unimaginable in the past.

Numerous respondents commented that they had not been aware of government initiatives or the rural women's movement prior to reading the research project flyer for this project which noted the world leading rural women's policies in Australia, and they were very pleased to discover that Australia was ahead of European countries in this regard.

All respondents were, however, aware of the ABC Radio Rural Woman of the Year Award, and many had read Sara Henderson's biography and associated her with the high-achieving rural women. Respondents asserted that local winners of the Victorian Rural Woman of the Year provided excellent role models and ambassadors for the region, who typified many of the very positive aspects of women in rural communities, notably resourcefulness, resilience in the face of adversity, modesty and graciousness. In addition several respondents commented that they were particularly impressed by the award because it focused on achievement, and was judged by the telephone and therefore appearance was not a consideration. One respondent commented that she was impressed that "People are judged on what their knowledge is and what they are saying and not what they look like".

Respondents also commented that the award gave a platform and credibility to the ABC State and National Rural Woman of The Year, and assisted the women to promote their industry and region, raising the visibility of women, and gaining important networking skills and contacts which were used for the benefit of the community. The only reservations individual respondents had about the award was that rural women who were not connected with resource management could not be nominated, and that they felt some important work being done by women for women in rural communities remained unrecognised. Several women were disappointed that ABC Radio was not going to continue with the award, and some asserted that the critical difference between the Rural Women's Network and the ABC Radio award was that through the award, the ABC had raised awareness of rural issues in cities and towns and done much to promote and support rural women's initiatives.

Only two respondents had attended 'Women on Farms' gatherings in Victoria, although the 1998 'Women on Farms Gathering' in Ouyen may have increased awareness of the event in Mildura. The respondents who had attended felt very positively about the gathering, and felt that they were extremely inspiring events. One respondent commented that her attendance encouraged her to keep campaigning for rural women's issues:

"It's probably given me the encouragement to sort of keep pushing on in the wider field, whereas I feel like giving up, you know I feel I'm banging my head against a brick wall, and I think oh will I bother, and then it sort of inspires me to keep fighting."

22 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

22.1 Policy Implications: The view from the grass roots and the existing policy agenda

Respondents interviewed as part of this research project were asked for their views of the future and future priorities for the Sunraysia area, and many respondents suggested that if the government addressed women's priorities they would be dealing with the real problems facing rural communities.

"Women are involved at a government level. But ultimately what they really need is, they need a Country Woman to run Government for a while and we'll sort out a few problems."

Not surprisingly as rural women drew up the recommendations of the National Rural Women's Forum in 1995, many of the recommendations of rural women who took part in this research echo the priorities of the Forum. It could be asserted that if the Forum recommendations are a unique collaboration between government and the grass roots for a 'logic for action' in advancing prosperity and gender equity in rural Australia. In many regards this research is one of numerous confirmations of the Forum recommendations, and many of the rural women who commented on the future of rural women's policy in this study, stressed that the government should work on a plan grounded in reality, a plan which in fact has already been drawn together in the existing policy framework.

As this report is primarily aimed at respondents from the research project and they were largely unaware of the results of the forum, the twenty-seven recommendations are as follows:

VISIBILITY AND RECOGNITION OF RURAL WOMEN

Recommendation 1

That policy be developed at all levels of government and industry lobby groups which will include:

- immediate research to determine the actual economic contribution of women in agricultural industries and rural communities to the gross domestic product in actual dollar terms including their on and off farm work and paid and unpaid work (recognising that unpaid work underpins the economic viability of sustainable communities);
- a challenge to the assumptions that underpin the gender stereotyping of rural and remote women;
- an insistence that Australian rural and remote women have access to basic human rights which will redress existing legal, financial and social inequities.

ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

Recommendation 2

That State/Territory Governments and farmer and industry organisations match the Federal Government's commitment to achieve gender and socio-cultural equity on their boards and advisory committees by the year 2000.

Recommendation 3

That these organisations and the Federal Government put in place targets and strategies to achieve equal participation of rural women in all levels of decision making.

NETWORKING

Recommendation 4

That the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy, in consultation with the Office of the Status of Women, enter into discussions with their State and Territory counterparts for the purpose of:

- encouraging the establishment of State/Territory supported rural women's networks where they are not yet in place;
- maintaining and learning from the work of existing networks;
- developing a National Rural Women's Network based on the State/Territory activity; and
- agreeing of resource arrangements for, and the functions of the national network.

Recommendation 5

That the National Rural Women's Network encourage the participation of rural and remote women from all industry and community sectors, including women in all spheres of rural Australia across all socio-cultural groups and across all disciplines - from primary industry to human services.

Recommendation 6

That the Commonwealth Government put in place arrangements for the monitoring of policy developments across portfolios to ensure the needs and circumstances of rural women are properly taken account of:

- by establishing a Rural Women's Section within the Office of the Status of Women; and
- by providing the DPIE Rural Women's Unit with authority and resources to monitor and advise on government policy development and implementation

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO AGRICULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Recommendation 7

That the Federal Government work with rural and remote women to advance the economic viability on which agricultural and environmental sustainability depend.

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO VIABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES AND MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

Recommendation 8

That policies and decisions which affect change in rural and remote communities take into account not only economic factors but also the social and cultural value to the community of the services affected.

Recommendation 9

That the development and management of a community's human, environmental and business resources be based on partnerships between governments, the private sector and individual citizens and that women play a vital role in this partnership.

Recommendation 10

That the important contribution of women in managing change be recognised and supported.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

Recommendation 11

That the State and Federal governments provide continuity of funding to enable rural and remote women and their families access to relevant education and training through flexible delivery.

Recommendation 12

That the State and Federal Governments provide sufficient funding to allow rural and remote children to access quality education of their choice and relevant to their needs.

Recommendation 13

That the Federal Government ensure more equitable access to education for rural students by:

- changing the method of eligibility assessment for payment of Austudy to an income-based means test and that any test exclude 100% of assets which are used solely for the generation of income in rural and remote areas;
- increasing funding for individual recipients of Austudy including increased support for students required to live away from home;
- providing a supervisor/home tutor allowance to give geographically isolated teaching-parents the financial means to access the services and help they require.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Recommendation 14

That a rural and remote women's charter for citizenship be developed which will include the right to access adequate services including health, welfare, transport, roads, modern communication technology and regular mail delivery.

Recommendation 15

That the Commonwealth Government ensure a more appropriate model for assessing assets and eligibility criteria in relation to social security payment for rural and farm families.

Recommendation 16

That more flexible approaches to child care services and more child care places be provided for rural families.

Recommendation 17

That the Commonwealth and State Governments:

- ensure a choice of health services which are adequately and securely funded;
- ensure access and equity to the broad spectrum of health services in rural and remote areas; and
- ensure incentives be provided for the retention, recruitment and support of health service professionals.

Recommendation 18

That the Commonwealth Government provide a rural health support service for remote families to address the needs of isolated living as part of a health prevention [promotion] and information program.

Recommendation 19

That adequate and accessible crisis services be available to rural and remote women who are victims of violence.

Recommendation 20

That Commonwealth and State Governments recognise and address transport inequities in rural and remote areas.

Recommendation 21

That part of the charter for each state Rural Women's Network be to advise the State Government on the impact to farming families of national disasters, drought, mice plagues, unpredictable weather conditions and other unforeseen negative circumstances.

Recommendation 22

That small businesses in rural and remote areas be included in government assistance in times of drought, national disaster and extreme hardship.

Recommendation 23

That drought assistance be provided on a needs basis with individual assessment of regions based on factors other than rainfall and artificial State Government or regional boundaries.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Recommendation 24

That the Commonwealth Government, in particular DPIE and OSW, recognise rural and remote women as a client group by ensuring:

- that the Rural Women's Unit (DPIE) liaise with government agencies to ensure their reporting mechanisms account for rural and remote women;
- that OSW ensure that all policy assessed and developed takes account of the particular needs of rural and remote women;
- that a mechanism be put in place for OSW to do this.

Recommendation 25

That the Rural Women's Unit (DPIE) have responsibility for co-ordinating the assessment of DPIE policies and programs for their impact on rural and remote women by:

- setting up reporting mechanisms within each Division on the impact of policies and programs for rural and remote women;

- putting in place an accountability strategy;
- reporting annually to the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy.

Recommendation 26

That an Office of Rural Communities be established in the Federal Government to:

- play a co-ordinating role and develop cohesive rural policy at the national level;
- monitor and advise on the impact of policy proposals on rural communities (eg through a rural communities impact statement);
- develop policies and programs in consultation with relevant portfolios to deliver better and more co-ordinated services to rural communities;
- advise the government on equitable access to programs and services by rural and remote people;
- advise the government on general measures for overcoming locational disadvantage.

Recommendation 27

That the Federal Cabinet endorses the inclusion of a Rural Communities Impact Statement in all future policies and information papers submitted to Cabinet and ensure:

- that the Minister for Primary Industries and Energy in conjunction with his Department develop a Cabinet submission to put in place the inclusion of a Rural Communities Impact Statement in all future policy and information submissions to Federal Cabinet;
- that gender issues are a component of the Rural Communities Impact Statement;
- that 'remote' issues are a component of the Rural Communities Impact Statement;
- that issues for indigenous and Non English Speaking Background (NESB) women are a component of the Rural Communities' Impact Statement.

22.2 Policy implications arising from this study

The policy implications arising from this research would therefore be that the government has a clear agenda for rural women's issues and has consultative networks which will continue to provide direct communication from the grass roots to government on rural women's issues. When talking about rural women's concerns one respondent asked "How do these things come to the attention of politicians, it's a miracle I suppose", but it is clear that rural women's issues have been in place on the political agenda through the hard political lobbying, commitment and dedication of rural women over the past decade.

Despite being relatively unaware of specific rural women's policies the women were clear about their increasing concerns about the impact of economic rationalist policies on rural communities within Victoria and Australia, and despite an emphasis by many respondents on self-reliance respondents were concerned that economic rationalist policies increased the differences between rich and poor.

"The State and Federal governments, have not demonstrated great commitment to disadvantaged people in the community. Clearly they don't even see it as part of their mandate. I see part of government as providing for people who can't provide for themselves."

"At a political level too we are going through a pretty tough time in terms of government cut backs to services and to employment as well at both levels of government now. It's a bit of a grim time, it's a tough time. It's a sort of survival of the fittest time. It's sort of becoming I guess a bit like Britain is, and hopefully is going to change now, with the underclass in Australia, you know the haves and the have nots. I think we've gone down that track a bit

haven't we, and it's such a shame, because it's sort of not really been our culture. And it's become very stark, the economic rationalists have really won the arguments."

23 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

23.1 Women at the Grass Roots: Research Findings from Mildura

This study reflected the diversity of rural women's interests, but also their common cause, and commitment to sustaining diverse and prosperous rural communities. The women who contributed to this research in the case study town of Mildura, emphasised the importance of changing attitudes to women's place in the world, in the home, schools, and community groups, as well as at a policy level. Women led by example, as much as by activism, in Mildura, and demonstrated success in business, primary industries, service provision, parenting, caring, and as homemakers. Women emphasised the importance of recognising women's contribution to the history of Sunraysia, as well as celebrating the opportunities open to younger women in the future. Grandmothers, mothers and daughters reflected on their changing aspirations, and on the need for women to be visible and respected on the land, in rural towns, in the family, and as individuals in their own right.

The phenomenal success of the rural women's movement contrasted with a slower pace of change at the 'grass roots' and key issues raised were the importance of: recognising the challenges facing 'urban' rural women as well as women working in primary industries; supporting changes in education which encourage girls and women to fulfil their potential; recognising women's capacity for leadership, and excellence in business and primary industries; continuing support for women's health programmes, notably reproductive health; and the critical importance of providing greater support for women caring for family members with illness or disabilities in rural communities.

Women championed changes in family values which meant that many men were now more involved with parenting and taking a greater role in homemaking. Women and men stressed the benefits gained by men by being more involved in child care and family life, and emphasised the advantages in marriage of men supporting women in fulfilling their potential both within and outwith the home.

Considerable concern was expressed by women about the many 'families in crisis' in the community, in particular the impact of male unemployment in rural areas. Many women asserted that male unemployment led to increased levels of alcoholism, gambling, and domestic violence. Youth male suicide was viewed by many as symptomatic of a wider 'crisis of masculinity' in rural society, and expressed their concern about the many 'absent fathers' in households in Mildura. Women supported the promotion of positive male role models, and education programmes which would encourage boys to respect themselves, and to develop positive and more equal relationships with girls and women.

Women in Mildura recognised the role of organisations such as the Country Women's Association and the Federation of Business and Professional Women's Club in managing and supporting change for women, but noted the challenges facing women who raised awareness of 'difficult' issues, such as domestic violence, in remote rural towns. There was universal support for the rural domestic violence initiatives.

23.2 The Wider Rural Women's Movement

The Rural Women's Gatherings, and Rural Women's Networks and their magazines provided inspiration and support to women, and to their families and communities. The outstanding Rural Women's Network magazines, notably in NSW and Victoria, communicated vital information direct to women's homes and workplaces. The quality of these publications, and the close relationships forged via the medium of the magazines between policy makers, practitioners and women in communities was exemplary. State and Federal programs for rural women in Australia demonstrate 'best practice' in rural and community development work. The ABC Radio Rural Woman of The Year Award, and development of NGOs such as Australian Women in Agriculture, the Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women and the formation of women's commodity groups has also enabled more women to become involved in the policy process, and raised the visibility of women in primary industries.

The Rural Women's Unit and State support for rural women's issues have embedded a commitment towards the 'three legged stool' approach to rural women's policy at the heart of government, providing a balance between social, environmental and economic concerns. The research showed a commitment to an holistic approach to policy, and there was strong resistance amongst rural women to prioritising economic

programmes above social or environmental concerns. Rural Women emphasised that 'people' not 'profitability' make prosperity in rural communities.

'Femocrats' (feminist bureaucrats), academics, rural activists, existing women's organisations and 'ordinary' rural women have formed unprecedented alliances at a local, regional, State and Federal level to campaign for rural communities. The first National Rural Women's Forum in 1995, provided a foundation for policy, written by rural women, for rural women, which has since drawn cross-party support. The research reflects the hope amongst ordinary rural women that politicians, policy makers and practitioners will continue to work together to support women and their families in rural communities.

23.3 Lessons For Scotland

The lobbying skills and activism of the rural women's movement, and the commitment and the working confidence that exists between policy makers and rural women, provides valuable lessons for policy makers, practitioners and rural communities in Scotland. The experience of the Office for Status of Women, and State Departments for Women, has the potential to provide comparative models for the development of the relationship between the newly established Women's Unit reporting to the Westminster Parliament (in London, England) and women's representation in the new Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. The development of the Federal Rural Women's Unit could also provide a model for European Union action on rural women's issues.

The rural women's movement in Australia has enabled women to claim their right to visibility in the rural economy, and empowered them to use women's ways of working to develop a sustainable future. The dynamism of the movement, and the success of women's commodity groups in primary industries in Australia, has the potential to demonstrate to rural women not only in Scotland, but also in Europe, the power women in rural communities can exert to defend the interest of their families and communities.

Appendix 11

Text from selected advice cards in the *National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit*, Published October 1997

Text from Advice Cards in the National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit, Published October 1997

Country Women - Strong Women

Most country women would not want to live anywhere else. Whether a woman lives on a large cattle property, in a small rural town, a tribal community, in a mining, grazing or agricultural area, there is a bond between themselves, the land, the country side and the way of life. Rural Women come from a range of different backgrounds. They are married, single, partnered and unpartnered. Their families have lived here for generations, for thousands of years, or were born in other countries. They may or may not speak English. Country women are resourceful in their various roles as mothers, farmers, carers, students, organisers, workers, community members, neighbours, friends and partners.

Country women need to be resourceful. Each area of the country has challenges for those who live there. Apart from the ever present good years and bad years - to do with the weather, government decisions, and the local economy - distance from other people and other places affects country women wherever they live.

For a rural woman who experiences violence from her partner, both geographical distance and fear of a lack of confidentiality, can work to keep her socially isolated. In some communities everyone knows everything about everyone, and it can take great courage to reach out for assistance to change her situation. Fear can be the most powerful weapon. The decision to leave a violent partner is not a simple matter. It can be extremely difficult for a woman to walk away from land, friends, and familiar life. Local services may be an option for support, however, there are confidential Statewide Services she can contact. It may take time to find the right person, but for most women there is a friend, person in their family or member of the local community who can listen, believe her and support her decisions.

All women have the right to live in a safe place free from fear. All rural women can support this right through knowledge and action.

Why Does She Stay?

Why does a Woman Stay With/Return To A Violent Partner?

Many people believe that 'if a woman doesn't like what is happening she can leave'. Unfortunately it's just not that simple. A less common question is "Why doesn't he stop his violence?"

Some reasons it may be difficult for a woman to leave

She wants the relationship to continue but just wants the violence to stop.

she may still love him. She may be pregnant.

She may think she is to blame for the abuse.

She may think the problem is to do with stress/alcohol.

She still hopes he may change without outside help.

He apologises and says that he'll never abuse her again.

He has threatened to take the children.

She experiences her partner as loving and caring some of the time and tries to ignore the bad times.

Her commitment to marriage may be so strong that leaving is not considered an option.

Religion or culture forbids leaving.

She may have dreams and hopes and may not want to split her family. He may have a good relationship with the children.

She believes he can't cope without her and that she has to support him emotionally.

He threatens suicide.

She has been socially isolated and feels she has no support.

She may fear loneliness and have little confidence to cope on her own. The abuse has lowered her self esteem.

She fears the loss of financial security for herself and children.

She feels too depressed or upset to make decisions.

She fears being labelled as a battered wife or a single mother.

Her family/friends pressure her to stay/return.

People don't believe that the problem is as bad as she says it is.

She fears further violence of murder should she leave.

Domestic violence usually increases in frequency and intensity over time and can escalate after separation.

Helping Hands - Friends, Family, Community

Ways to help a friend or a woman in your family
It can be distressing to know someone in this position.
Here are some suggestions about what you can do.

Safety This is the most important consideration. Help her to look at ways of keeping herself safe, to make a safety plan.

Be Supportive Give your friend emotional comfort. Be non-judgmental, listen to what she has to say and believe her.

Encourage Action Be sensitive and discuss her fears about approaching the police or social service agencies.

Reassure Her She is not responsible for her partner's actions. He is the only one who has control over his behaviour.

Reinforce We all expect to live free from violence. Violence within the home is a crime and her partner can be charged with assault.

Information Make sure she has information about what her rights are in relation to Orders, Shelters/Refuges, Counselling, Support Groups, Legal Issues and other services. Specialist services can assist a woman from an Aboriginal, or Non-English Speaking background

Don't make decisions for her

Don't ask what she did to provoke the violence

Don't suggest that she try again.

Don't expect her to reach decisions in a hurry.

Don't call her at home without checking with her beforehand.

Don't inform anyone of her new address should she leave.

Don't get involved in his justifications for his actions.

Don't let him know where she is.

Don't give up on her if she leaves and then goes back.

Appendix 12

Text from Mallee Domestic Violence Services information flyer, 1997

Text From Mallee Domestic Violence Services Information Flyer, 1997.

What is Domestic Violence?

- Domestic Violence is the abuse of power, particularly the power of men over women.
- Almost always men are the abusers and women and children are the victims.
- It happens to all kinds of families

Domestic Violence is not just about being hit it can be:

Physical: bruises, cuts, broken bones, burns, throwing and breaking household objects, punching and kicking walls and doors etc.

Sexual: rape, bondage, use of objects against your will, demanding sex.

Emotional/Verbal: threats and intimidation, put downs about your body shape, grooming and mothering abilities, erosion of self esteem, destruction of self worth.

Social: put downs in front of other people, isolating you from your family and friends, smothering you by being with you all the time, and not giving you any personal space.

Economicor Financial: "keep you poor", demanding you pay all the bills and food etc. with completely inadequate money or not allowing you to have any money.

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